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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

August 2012

Vol. 117, No. 8



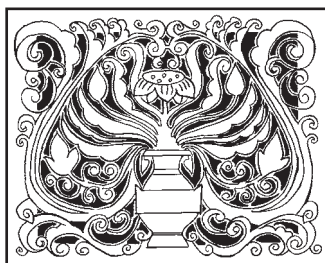
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Contents



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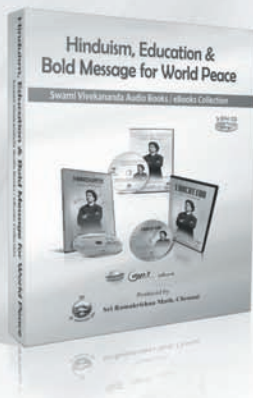
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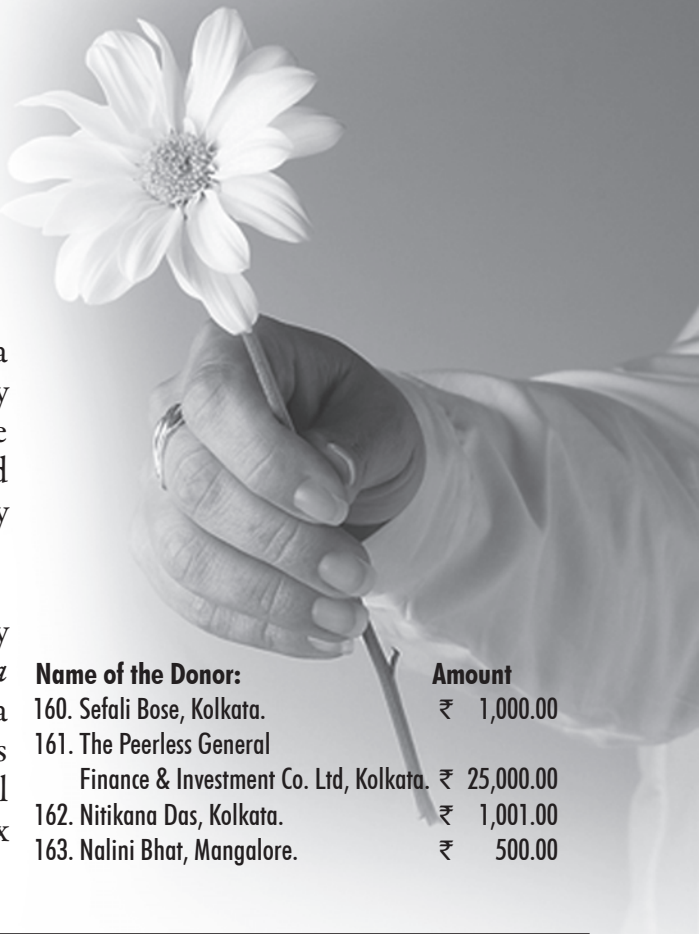
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Defeating Death

August 2012
Vol. 117, No. 8

यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वास्मिँल्लोके जुहोति यजते तपस्तप्यते बहूनि
वर्षसहस्राणि अन्तवदेवास्य तद्व्रवति यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वास्माल्लोकात्त्रैति
स कृपणः अथ य एतदक्षरं गार्गि विदित्वास्माल्लोकात्त्रैति स ब्राह्मणः ॥

He, O Gargi, who in this world without knowing this Immutable offers oblations in the fire, performs sacrifices, and undergoes austerities even for many thousand years, finds all such acts but perishable; he, O Gargi, who departs from this world without knowing this Immutable is miserable. But he, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing this Immutable is a knower of Brahman.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.10)

पराचः कामाननुयन्ति बालास्ते मृत्योर्यन्ति विततस्य पाशम् ।
अथ धीरा अमृतत्वं विदित्वा ध्रुवमध्रुवेष्विह न प्रार्थयन्ते ॥

Unintelligent people follow external desires; they get entangled in the snares of widespread death. Therefore, discerning people, having known what true immortality is in the midst of impermanent things, do not pray for anything here.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.2)

स एव सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यं सनातनम् ।
ज्ञात्वा तं मृत्युमत्येति नान्यः पन्था विमुक्तये ॥

He [Brahman] alone is all that was, and all that will be, the Eternal. Knowing him one transcends death; there is no other way to freedom.

(*Kaivalya Upanishad*, 9)

THIS MONTH

Many condemn, justifiably, human and social immorality. **Orientation towards Universality** shows how humankind is moving in the right direction despite all its glaring mistakes.

Dr Suruchi Pande, a researcher and scholar from Pune, discusses the sublime teachings that Yajnavalkya taught to Maitreyi, which appear in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, in the light of **Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi: The Householder Ideal**.



Dynamics of Morality and Justice in the Smritis reveals how the sage Manu formulated the crucial questions of morality and duties. The author, Swami Samarpanananda, is from the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur.

Dr K R Leena, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, NSS College, Karamana, Kerala, explains that the **Role of Libraries in Developing Rural India**, through extension activities and programmes, is essential in building a great nation.



William Page, retired professor of English from Thammasat University, Bangkok, reminds us of the goal of life in **Lest We Forget**.

Ruma Nath Choudhury, Department of Philosophy, Radhamadav College, Silchar, and Umasankar Nath, Department of History, Cachar College, Silchar reflects on the highest human ethics made practical in **Vivekananda's Social Ethics: Principles and Framework**.

Disease, old age, and death follow life like a shadow, often creating tremendous moral, social, and legal dilemmas. Dr Vinitha Mohan, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, HHMSBPBNS College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, looks at these problems in **Euthanasia: Ethical Implications**.

Tapas Mukherjee of Gurgaon presents, through the first shloka of the Bhagavadgita, the way of **Dispelling the Shadow of Death**.

In the ninth and final part of **Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels** Somenath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, describes Swamiji's final voyage back to Bombay on the SS *Rubattino* and the impact his journeys to the West had on orthodox Indian minds.



Orientation towards Universality

THERE ARE MANY CRISES facing humankind, but one that has dogged us from ancient times is morality and immorality. This crucial question is also mysterious: Where have ideas of morality originated from? Why are humans troubled by them? Are we wrong in restricting morality only to our species? These questions have been the first step in the attempt to understand ourselves and have exercised some of the greatest minds in human history.

We find abstract or unwritten moral codes wherever there is cooperation in life. Life thrives through cooperation. It is true that there is also competition, conflict, and struggle, which make morality difficult to understand and practise. But if there were no competition, there would be no cooperation as well. These two forces govern creation, and all life is held under their thralldom. One makes, the other breaks; one attracts, the other repels, and so on. They also go by various names: good and evil, light and shadow, positive and negative, centripetal and centrifugal, and so forth. Hence, we can safely say that the origins of morality lie not only within life but also in the very fabric of nature. If these forces, or laws, are taken as codes of conduct, it can be said that they are written into the existence of every being and the universe as well.


If these two forces are uniform throughout life and nature, then why does morality differ from person to person, community to community, race to race, period to period? This conundrum has led various philosophers to seek for one persistent ethical law of morality. The

first step was to find a normative ethical behaviour through natural law; it means 'a system of right or justice held to be common to all humans and derived from nature rather than from the rules of society.' There was a natural justice valid everywhere and with the same force for all. But this led to much confusion, because humankind's social orientations and struggles to adjust to the world give rise to social laws, and often natural law is not the same as laws derived from society. For instance, the ideas of slavery and inferiority of women went against natural laws. An attempt was made to discover and appeal to laws embedded within human reason and conscience. This attempt tried to unravel how, within the human psyche, ideas of right and wrong, justice and injustice could be the yardsticks of morality. This too failed to find a normative ethical behaviour due to the vast variation among individuals in any given circumstances. Many cultures, through much trial and error, developed intuitive or ideal conceptions of what human development would mean, basing their laws on this assertion. This was a better development than the preceding ones, as human nature was idealized, that is, removed from the limited circle of natural laws, social orientations and obligations, reason, and conscience. This development and further insights led humans to believe that facts presented about nature, society, and human conditions are not correct but open to many corrections and adjustments in order to build an ideal individual and society.

It is true that such universal idealism was

rejected by the realists, who built a system on the tangible and the perceptible. Others personalized morality in the forms of gods and goddesses that embodied moral codes, thereby giving sanction and formal authority to morality. Thus began the various myths of tribal gods and goddesses ruling the tribe through ethical laws, which if obeyed would confer the reward of an eternal life with these divinities in a higher world. The fighting began when they came across other people whose ideas of gods and goddesses differed from *their* moral codes. All the fighting was not just to decide the superiority of one's ideas of God but also of society, tribe, way of life, morality, and oneself. Through the clashes all these different levels fused to become one, and the defeat in one factor meant total defeat. This part of human history has been written with blood, while reason, conscience, and other social laws were abandoned. Corrective measures were then applied by many cultures and civilizations by separating religion from the state. All morality and ethics should be based on human nature and not on external sanctions. Hence, the present movement towards the search for universal morality has once more returned to the study of human beings.

Some aver that humans are akin to brutes and need to be controlled and forced into morality. But letting each person derive his or her moral codes from within will not work, because individual morality depends on many factors such as education, culture, wealth, status, and so on. There cannot be pure morality derived from the individual, as humans and their brains are socially oriented for development; such social factors will always colour their morality. True, there have been persons who have stood against social moral dictates and acted on personal inner imperatives to do good, but there are also the negative ones, who do evil against their own conscience, reason, society, religion, and natural laws.

In the old days we believed in a static universe, a static God whose laws and rewards were also static; natural laws were static and irrevocable, and obviously an individual was also built on this static plan. The whole structure began crumbling when we saw ourselves as dynamic. This perspective was the secret of individual, moral, and social growth. Ideas of dynamism were also applied to nature, with her two forces, including our conceptions of God. The static world view had made humans morbid and stunted; dynamism brought growth and creativity. This was the first step out of the shadow of chaos, mystery, and confusion regarding morality. The next step was the need of an overarching universal system that would harmonize all the preceding stages of growth. The various stages humankind has traversed have many things that are true and rightly oriented. The mistakes and errors were just stumbling blocks on the way to reaching the goal. Providentially, we do not have to build a new overarching system of philosophy, as there is one existing in Vedanta that has the scope to accommodate all human, social, and other needs of today and tomorrow. Vedanta makes an individual, universal; particular moral codes, universal morality; particular societies, universal societies; particular religions, universal religions. Moreover, Vedanta is in consonance with natural laws, individual aspirations, and also with idealized conceptions of humanity. Fortunately Swami Vivekananda has given us the broad outlines; we now need to work them out in our individual lives. The real nature of the individual as the immortal Atman is the basis of morality. This understanding transforms human consciousness and helps us find the eternal as our birthright, while morality and immorality become just stages in life to be finally transcended. Consciously and unconsciously societies are veering towards this immortality, leaving behind the mystery, crises, and death. 

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi: The Householder Ideal

Dr Suruchi Pande

ALBERTA STURGES: “Is there no happiness in marriage?” Swami Vivekananda: “Yes, Alberta, if marriage is entered into as a great austerity—and everything is given up—even principle!”¹ Swami Vivekananda articulated the ancient Indian ideal of marriage beautifully. All through religious history this ideal was made practical and tangible in the lives of many saintly husbands and wives. Tapasya, austerity; *tyaga*, renunciation; and jnana, knowledge, are not just meant for sannyasins but for householders as well. These are the ultimate Vedantic disciplines to be practised by all.

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* we find the noble Maitreyi—a *brahamavadini*, expert in the doctrine of Brahman—asking her husband Yajnavalkya: “Venerable Sir, if indeed the whole earth full of wealth belonged to me, would I be immortal through that?” “No,” replied Yajnavalkya, “your life would be just like that of people who have plenty. Of Immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth.” Then Maitreyi said: “What should I do with that which would not make me immortal? Tell me, venerable Sir, of that alone which you know [to be the means of attaining Immortality].”²

The wealthy Mathuranath Biswas, son-in-law of Rani Rashmani, served Sri Ramakrishna for many years in every possible way. Mathur Babu never had a shade of doubt about the Master’s renunciation. An incident is narrated here:

Can any and every plate, cup, etc., be considered fit for ‘father’ to eat and drink from? Thinking so, he had a new set of gold and silver things made in which he offered him food and drink; he dressed him in excellent clothes and said, ‘It is you, father, who are the owner of all these (his estate and other property); I am nothing but the steward; consider how you eat and drink from these gold plates and silver cups and glasses and then leave them behind without even looking at them.’³

Sri Ramakrishna also was once ‘angry at the suggestion of Mathur’s making a gift of a property worth several thousand rupees that he ran hither and thither with a stick in his hand to beat Mathur’ (749). We shall see later that Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was also established in great austerity, renunciation, and knowledge.

Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi as well as Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi represent the same ideal of earnestness and renunciation in different ways, according to the epoch in which they appeared. They have revived the ideal of renunciation as the basis of every ashrama, stage, of human life.

Similarities

We find the *samvada*, dialogue, between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi occurring twice in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.⁴ Therefore, I will contemplate here on these Upanishadic mantras in the light of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna

and Sri Sarada Devi and search for similarities in their characters. We cannot differentiate between Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna as they are forms of the same principle. A line of a hymn composed by Swami Saradananda says: ‘*Yathagnerdahika shakti ramakrishne sthita hi ya*; as fire and its power to burn is she established in Ramakrishna.’⁵

Yajnavalkya was one of the most brilliant among the Vedic sages. He was the son of sage Brahmarata and the nephew and disciple of Maharishi Vaishampayana. Once, seeing the young Yajnavalkya’s pride of knowledge, his guru scolded him and asked him to return what he had learnt. Yajnavalkya did so, and other disciples received it. This knowledge came to be known as the Krishna Yajur Veda. Yajnavalkya left and practised great austerities to propitiate Surya, the sun god. Surya bestowed knowledge on Yajnavalkya and this came to be known as the Shukla Yajur Veda, which is also called *Vajasaneyi Samhita*. Later Yajnavalkya had two wives: Maitreyi and Katyayani. Maitreyi was the daughter of the minister named Mitra, who served King Janaka. The illustrious *brahmavadini* Gargi Vachaknavi, who debated with Yajnavalkya in the court of King Janaka as described in the Upanishad, was Maitreyi’s aunt. It was Gargi who taught and reared Maitreyi. It was the pursuit of the highest ideals that brought Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi together. Maitreyi was aware of Yajnavalkya’s great prowess, and he was also aware of her as a *brahmavadini*. In the Vedic Age a householder’s life centred on learning, knowledge, and rituals. Moreover, as Yajnavalkya had many disciples, his wives had the responsibility for looking after the young disciples as mothers do. In such a setting of a householder’s life it is natural to have a spirit of austerity and renunciation. Among Yajnavalkya’s two wives, Maitreyi always longed for spiritual knowledge from her husband.

In Dakshineswar we find how the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna looked upon the Holy Mother as their own mother. It was her duty to look after their needs, both temporal and spiritual. In Dakshineswar there was a re-enactment of the hermitages of yore. No worldliness was present in their relationship, which was based on renunciation and austerity. The Holy Mother said: ‘I got real education, at Dakshineswar.’⁶ She lived in a small cramped room that astounded visitors, and her whole day was spent in serving her husband and in sadhana. Both Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother chose each other in altogether different contexts. Sri Ramakrishna’s mother Chandramani Devi was anxious on hearing that her son had given up his priestly duties and was suffering from insanity. After having performed some rites and after a good deal of consultation, his mother and brother secretly decided to get Sri Ramakrishna married and started to search for a bride. When Sri Ramakrishna came to know of it, he did not raise any objection and in the state of *bhava* samadhi said: ‘It is useless to search here and there; go and search in the family of Ram Mukhopadhyaya of the village of Jayaramvati [*sic*]; the bride has been marked with a straw and kept reserved there.’⁷

On the part of the Holy Mother we find the same divine inspiration in choosing her husband. Her maternal uncle lived in the village Shihar, where there used to be annual celebrations in the name of Shantinath Shiva with kirtan, yatras, and dramas. Sri Ramakrishna often attended these festivities as his nephew Hridayaram was from that village. During one such festival Sri Sarada Devi, who was a mere child, was sitting on the lap of a woman when, out of fun, the woman asked her: “Whom among the great number of people, assembled here, would you like to marry?” Sarada Devi at

once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was, but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfilment of the wishes of that unerring heart.’⁸

Both couples, Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi and Sri Ramakrishna-Sri Sarada Devi, selected each other to fulfil some divine purpose and to set forth the ideal Grihastha Ashrama. ‘The Master took upon his shoulders the duties and responsibilities of married life and followed in practice that very high ideal before the eyes of all, by actually discharging them to the farthest limit.’⁹ Sri Ramakrishna taught Sri Sarada Devi ‘all the domestic matters such as how to place the wick in the lamp, what sort of man each member of the household was, how to behave with each of them, and how to behave when she went to someone else’s house. He taught

her also devotional exercises, the reciting of the names and glories of God, meditation, Samadhi and even the knowledge of Brahman’ (579). The Holy Mother said that she never saw her husband morose; moreover, she felt as if a jar of bliss was constantly overflowing in her heart. Sometimes they did not meet for days together, but they were in tune with each other with great intensity and pure affection. Swami Saradananda states that Sri Ramakrishna married ‘so that you might learn that it was not for indulgence in sensual pleasure that the institution of marriage has come into being but that it carried a very high purpose with it. ... This unseen and unheard-of sacred mould of married life has been cast for the first time in the world as a result of lifelong severe austerities and Sadhana’ (580). The Holy Mother also once asked Sri Ramakrishna: “How do you look on me?” Out came the reply “The Mother who is



in the temple, the Mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the Nahavat—the same Mother is now massaging my feet. Truly, I always look upon you as a form of the blissful divine Mother” (407–8). It can be well described by a verse from the *Valmiki Ramayana*: ‘*Antargatamapi vyaktamakhyati bridayam hrida*; (Sita) understood Rama’s inner thoughts with her own heart [insight].’¹⁰

When Jaynavalkya decided to renounce the householder life and accept monastic life, he called both his wives and told them about his decision. That both were noble can be understood by their reaction: they did not start crying and arguing, as they were established in renunciation and austerity. It was natural and logical for them, because that was the way they all lived. It must be remembered that the Holy Mother also heard that Sri Ramakrishna had become a monk and was always merged in higher consciousness. People, however, gossiped endlessly about this so-called madness of her husband, but when she met him at Kamarpukur, she realized ‘how baseless were the rumours; for she found that he was just his old self. The same amiability, the same loving merriment, the same austere truthfulness, the same profound religious care and the same surging of overwhelming emotion at the name of Hari—all these old qualities were seen in him in the fullest measure as before.’¹¹ Sri Ramakrishna’s sannyasa guru, knowing that Sri Ramakrishna was married, said: ‘What does it matter? He only may be regarded as really established in Brahman whose renunciation, detachment, discrimination and knowledge remain intact in all respects in spite of his wife being with him. He alone may be regarded as having really attained the knowledge of Brahman, who can always look equally upon both man and woman as the Self and behave accordingly’ (374).

We know that Sri Ramakrishna was not able to touch any metal, and the Holy Mother too was unattached to money. It is known how both of them refused a gift of considerable amount by one Lakshminarayan. Sri Ramakrishna, describing the pain on hearing the proposal, said: ‘I felt as if my head was being sawn through’ (749). In order to test the Holy Mother’s mind Sri Ramakrishna said:

‘Look here, he wants to give that sum [ten thousand rupees]. Since I cannot accept it, he wants to transfer it to your name. You may accept it. What do you say?’ As soon as she heard this, she said, ‘How can I accept it? The money can never be accepted; if I accept it, it will be the same thing as your accepting it. For, if I keep it with me, I cannot but spend it on your service and other necessities, so it comes to the same thing, namely, your acceptance. People love and respect you for your renunciation, the money, therefore, can by no means be accepted’ (1178).

There are many such incidents that show the reflections of an ideal relationship between the husband and the wife. They have shown us the highest expression of the exact meaning and depth of the *saptapadi*, seven-steps, rite in the Hindu marriage system.¹²

‘For the Sake of the Self’

Maitreyi knew that once Jaynavalkya entered the path of renunciation, she would never see him again, so this was her last opportunity to have a dialogue with her knowledgeable husband and to learn about spiritual things. Thus, the sage Jaynavalkya explained to her some fundamental truths of life. I will quote each line from a mantra of that dialogue and try to correlate the philosophical message conveyed in it with the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

‘Verily, not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is the husband loved, but he is loved for

the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the wife, my dear, is the wife loved, but she is loved for the sake of the self.’¹³ To Sri Ramakrishna, his wife was not just a woman, but the veritable form of the Divine Mother. On the Phalaharini Kali Puja night Sri Ramakrishna made all the necessary arrangements for worshipping Kali in his room, and the Holy Mother was made to take the deity’s seat. Then the Master, according to scriptural injunctions, worshipped the Holy Mother as the goddess Shodashi-Tripurasundari. After the elaborate worship he ‘offered himself to the Devi. He now gave away for ever at the lotus feet of the Devi his all—the results of his Sadhanas, his rosary etc.—along with his self, and saluted her.’¹⁴ This shows that their relationship existed on the level of the Atman, without the least trace of worldliness. As they experienced non-dualism they felt attracted to each other due to the pure and joyful nature of the Atman only.

‘Verily, not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are the sons loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self.’¹⁵ Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi displayed the highest manifestation of maternal love for children. Though they were established in the highest brahmacharya, the world became their family and all those who came to them, young or old, experienced their maternal love and felt and behaved like little children before parents. Sri Ramakrishna once said: ‘The attitude of looking on God as Mother is the highest form of spiritual discipline.’¹⁶ After Sri Ramakrishna’s *mahasamadhi* the Holy Mother, feeling left alone and neglected, was musing: ‘When the Master departed, I thought in solitude—I was then at Kamarpukur—“I’ve no son and nothing else; what will be my lot?” One day the Master appeared and said, “Why do you worry? You want one son—I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time many will call you

mother”’ (127). In this way they have established the highest ideal of motherhood.

‘Verily, not for the sake of wealth, my dear, is wealth loved, but it is loved for the sake of the self.’¹⁷ We have already discussed the non-attachment of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi to material prosperity. After the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, the small allowance of seven rupees he had been receiving was granted to the Holy Mother by Trailokyanath Bishwas, Mathur Babu’s son, which was later stopped by the machinations of Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna’s nephew, and Dinu, the cashier. Swami Vivekananda and others tried to reissue this small grant, but their efforts failed. The Holy Mother said with indifference: ‘If they have stopped it, let them have their way. When even the Master is gone, what shall I do with money?’¹⁸

‘Verily, not for the sake of the brahmin, my dear, is the brahmin loved, but he is loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the kshatriya, my dear, is the kshatriya loved, but he is loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the worlds, my dear, are the worlds loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the gods, my dear, are the gods loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self.’¹⁹ During the period of his austerities, Sri Ramakrishna used to enter into the dense jungle at the outskirts of the temple, take off his cloth and sacred thread, and then sit for meditation. When Hriday, who was curious and followed him, demanded an explanation for his weird behaviour, Sri Ramakrishna answered: ‘Thus freed from all ties, one should practice meditation. From his birth man labours under the “eight bondages”, of hatred, fear, shame, aversion, egoism, vanity, pride of noble descent and obsession with formal good conduct. The sacred thread also is a “bondage”, for it is a sign of egoism, “I am a Brahmin and superior to all.”

When one calls on Mother, one should discard all these “bondages” and call on Her.²⁰ This is how he discarded wrong ideas of the world and its bondages. Regarding the conception of various gods, Sri Ramakrishna explained that these are forms for the devotees: ‘Satchidananda is like an infinite ocean. Intense cold freezes the water into ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks or various forms. Likewise, through the cooling influence of bhakti, one sees forms of God in the Ocean of the Absolute.’²¹

‘Verily, not for the sake of the beings, my dear, are the beings loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of All, my dear, is the All loved, but it is loved for the sake of the self.’²² All through Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings and experiences one finds him saying: ‘Brahman alone has become everything.’²³ ‘Everything’ includes all living beings and the whole infinite universe.

Yajnavalkya concludes his teaching thus: ‘Verily, my dear Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be realized—should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon. By the realization of the Self, my dear—through hearing, reflection, and meditation—all this is known.’²⁴ Sri Ramakrishna teaches: ‘God can be seen and spoken with, just as I am seeing you and speaking with you; but who wants to do so? People grieve and shed potful of tears at the death of their wives and sons and behave in the same way for the sake of money or property; but who does so because he cannot realize God? If one is really equally anxious to see Him and calls on Him, He certainly reveals Himself to him.’²⁵

Reading, hearing, reflecting, and meditating on the wonderful lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi is the highest austerity and meditation on our own Self. By doing this, all their tapasya, tyaga, and jnana will also become ours and we will attain the bliss of Brahman. ❧

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7. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 245.
8. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 25.
9. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 578.
10. *Valmiki Ramayana*, ‘Bala Kanda’, 77.28.
11. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 370.
12. The mantras recited when the seven steps are taken are: ‘*Eshe ekapadi bhava / urje dvipadi bhava / rayasposhaya tripadi bhava / mayo-bhavyaya chatushpadi bhava / prajabhyah panchapadi bhava / rutubhyah shatpadi bhava / sakha saptapadi bhava*.’ And after every promise ‘*tvam me sahvavata bhava*’ is added.
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Dynamics of Morality and Justice in the Smritis

Swami Samarpanananda

THERE ARE MOMENTS when we wonder whether we are on the right path regarding morality and immorality. We question the idea of morality and justice in society and wonder about others' right and wrongdoings. We compare ourselves with others and ask whether we deserve to judge or to be judged in the way it is done. To understand the severity of the inner moral conflicts that can assail a person, one may look at Sri Ramakrishna's life. He was established in truth and also in complete renunciation. However, once, when he was about to start for Calcutta from Dakshineswar, Narendranath—later Swami Vivekananda—arrived. Sri Ramakrishna cancelled his trip and started saying: 'Naren has come. Will it be proper to go?' After seeing that Naren has arrived, Sri Ramakrishna preferred to keep company with him there, although he had fixed up another programme in Calcutta.

In another incident he told Naren, with tears in his eyes, that he was ready to beg from door to door for him. This, despite the fact that Sri Ramakrishna was established in renunciation and would never accept anything for himself. We also read about Swami Vivekananda worrying about his mother and even asking for monetary help from a devotee for her basic needs. Does this not contradict monastic principles? Not at all.

The acts of divine beings like Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda must not be judged by the standards of the common morality practised by society. Lord Shiva drank deadly poison; that

does not mean that if others try it, they will not be harmed. But the instances mentioned above do allow us to peep into the dynamics of morality—what it is and what it should be. Is morality universal or personal? Can justice be equal for all or is it by nature subjective?

The Idea of Universal Morality

The Vedas speak about *ritam* as the universal moral law that makes everything operate the way it does. Everyone and everything is expected to obey this law, and whatever is untruthful or unlawful or immoral is considered the opposite of this law: *anritam*.

In the scriptures, like the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita, as well as in the scriptures of every religion, the concept of morality lies rooted in universal principles. Swami Vivekananda comments on an aphorism of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*: 'These practices—non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and non-receiving—are to be practised by every man, woman, and child; by every soul, irrespective of nation, country, or position.'¹

Great philosophers who spoke about morality based their concepts on the lines of a universal moral principle. The great historian Will Durant writes: 'Morality, said Jesus, is kindness to the meek; morality, said Nietzsche, is the bravery of the strong; morality, says Plato, is the effective harmony of the whole.'²

The Babylonian code, composed during the reign of Hammurabi (1792–50 BCE), dictated

‘an eye for an eye’ and ‘an arm for an arm’. This echoes the idea of equal justice for all. Later this code, combined with the laws given by Moses, became the basis for the idea of universal morality and justice that permeated the religion, philosophy, ethics, and judiciary of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that goodwill is the characteristic of one who acts from a sense of duty in accordance with the universal moral law. He considered values as an end in themselves rather than being merely means to some end. Socrates believed in the absoluteness of morality and gave up his life, refusing to escape from the prison, for the sake of truth.

On the other end of the spectrum is Confucius, the great lawgiver of China, whose idea of morality stemmed from his respect for the strict hierarchy of family and society. This means that morality and justice in China was more on the personal side.

How does the Indian tradition look at this sensitive issue? For this we need to access the Smritis, the law books of the Hindus.

Shastras and Smritis

The framework of the Hindu way of life has been stated in the Vedas, but its details were worked out only in the Smritis. Works like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Puranas, and the Dharma Shastras—law books—are all Smritis. These Smritis are systemically arranged dharma, way of life and codes of conduct, scattered over different texts of the Vedas. They supplement and explain the Vidhi, what one should do, and the Nishedha, what one must not do, of the Vedas, which when followed properly can lead a person to mukti, liberation. These dharmas also regulated Hindu national, social, and individual obligations.

The main purpose behind any social or criminal law is to safeguard the interests of a community, whereas religious commandments are aimed at making ordinary people outgrow their savage nature. If there is no higher purpose behind a law, that law becomes a wall of imprisonment instead of becoming a wall of protection.

Smritis are neither law books nor are they like the constitution of a country; these are not even commandments, but are Shastras. The word ‘Shastra’ means ‘to govern’ and is applied to a book only if it teaches the ways and means to attain mukti. Books like the *Manu Smriti* are considered a Shastra because they teach how a person who performs his *svadharma*, own duties, faithfully can attain mukti. Thus, the Smritis show the way to realization through good conduct, morality, and the idea of justice.

The principles of religion present in the Vedas are unchangeable, but the religious practices that are based upon social positions and correlations have to evolve with the changes in society. Therefore, the Smritis have varied from time to time and place to place. There are eighteen main Smritis in Hinduism, and Manu, Yajnavalkya, and Parashara are the more celebrated lawgivers of the Hindus. Of these three Manu is the greatest, most authoritative, and oldest lawgiver. His work the *Manu Smriti* is the most famous law book of the Hindus.

Philosophy of the Smritis

There is a very precise and clear philosophy of life, both individual and social, behind the scheme of the Smritis. Like any other Hindu philosophy, these works treat the universe as an integral whole pulsating with life. According to them, the manifestation of that life is not the same everywhere: it sleeps in dead matter, is awake in plants, moves in animals, and is self-conscious in humans. The human being is considered to be the highest

expression of life, but it also has to evolve culturally, which includes spiritual growth. This evolution is possible through various means, of which the practise of *svadharma* is the best.

The writers of the Smritis accepted inequality in the universe as an inviolable fact. They believed that the real equality is possible only at the spiritual level. Therefore, they did not try to found a society on a theoretical possibility of equality. Instead, they struggled to work with the individuals and groups that they had at hand. They neither believed the inequality among humans, the castes, to be real or even presumable. But to perform indispensable functions in society each person had to be assigned a fixed role according to certain criteria. And these criteria were never fixed with greediness or materialistic motives. The existing social pattern and the ultimate spiritual goal were kept as the guiding principles of every Smriti.

The *Manu Smriti*, as well as other Smritis, mostly codify the practices of the majority of people of the period in which they were written, without contradicting the spiritual principles of the Vedas. It was obvious to these sages that to make a society run smoothly, it was necessary for all the members to follow a common code of conduct, which has been classified according to six kinds of duties: varna dharma, general caste duties; ashrama dharma, general duties related to the station of life; varna-ashrama dharma, based on the particular station of a particular caste; *ni-mitta* dharma, in this case penances and the like; *guna* dharma, duties related to particular social functions like those of kings, ministers, businessmen, and the like; and *samanya* dharma, duties common to all. They laid down the laws that regulated national, communal, family, and individual obligations in general, *samanya*, as well as in particular, *vishesha*. A person's *svadharma* comprised the combined duties of that person at the six levels mentioned above.

One very important concept of dharma that developed in the Smritis is the acceptance of a lower kind of dharma, in which it is prescribed to act in one way, and a higher kind of dharma, where staying away from that very act under certain conditions is considered to be more meritorious. For example, telling the truth is considered to be meritorious, but not telling the truth when it is unpleasant or harmful is considered to be more meritorious. Similarly, preaching dharma is meritorious, but not preaching dharma when it harms or injures others is considered to be more meritorious.

The *Manu Smriti* accepts that there is hardly any activity that is not prompted by kama, desire. But to act solely on such urges is tamasic, demeaning. To curb these base tendencies the sages promulgated dharma. Manu stressed the importance of dharma by saying that one is born alone, one dies alone, and one enjoys the fruits of one's deeds alone. Father, mother, wife, children, and friends would not come to one's help in the other world, but it is dharma alone that would come to one's aid at the end. He sums up his instructions on dharma by saying that of all the dharmas the attainment of knowledge of the Self is supreme, since that is the only way to attain immortality.

Manu's Treatment of Morality and Justice

Many of the statements of the *Manu Smriti* are considered healthy and acceptable, and nearly all the later Smritis were based on this work. It was considered so useful that South East Asian countries accepted the norms set by it. In it the approach towards various issues has one fundamental rule: quality is more important than quantity. Manu gives tremendous freedom and licences to the educated and the cultured, but he also demands huge sacrifices from them. While giving privileges to the brahmanas, he repeatedly

asserts that a brahmana who is not devoted to the Vedas and to austerities is not to be treated as a brahmana but as a sudra.

Manu accepts the existence of customs peculiar to place, class, and family. He advises the conquering king to safeguard and maintain the customs of the conquered people, and yet consolidate his own empire. In contrast, one may look at the various conquering barbarians and kings, including Alexander, whose first act after victory was to destroy the local culture. Today's India, despite all its diversity, is an integrated country because most of the Hindu kings of the past followed the political principles of Manu.

For Manu, the universal moral law is important, but it is not the only principle by which a person's conduct is to be regulated. He treats morality and justice as case-specific and context-specific. This means that morality and justice are for him not static, but dynamic. Swamiji presents the dilemma beautifully: 'Two ways are left open to us—the way of the ignorant, who think

that there is only one way to truth and that all the rest are wrong, and the way of the wise, who admit that, according to our mental constitution or the different planes of existence in which we are, duty and morality may vary.'³

That is the reason why Manu prescribes different treatments for different kinds of persons. For example: 'The seniority of brahmanas is from (sacred) knowledge, that of kshatriyas from valour, that of vaisyas from wealth, and that of sudras from age.'⁴ 'For a crime of theft, a sudra should be penalized 8 times, the penalty should be 16 times if he is a vaisya, 32 times if he is a kshatriya and 64 times if he is a brahmana. The punishment can be even 100 times or 128 times if he is a brahmana' (8.337–8). 'When the punishment for an ordinary citizen is 1 *pana*, coin, the punishment for those in the ruling class should be 1000 *panas*' (8.336).

On the other hand, Manu advises not to give the punishment of death to a brahmana. Instead, the convict's head should be shaven in public, which is equivalent to a death punishment for

*'Indian Law, Manu', sculpture by Henry Augustus Lukeman
in the Appellate Court Building, Madison Square Park and Vicinity, New York*



a brahmana.⁵ After all, greater responsibility comes with greater understanding, and with it comes greater accountability.

While explaining the role of the Smritis Swami Vivekananda said: 'The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal at the other end is the Chandala, and the whole work is to raise the Chandala up to the Brahmin. Slowly and slowly you find more and more privileges granted [by the Smritis] to them. ... Then gradually we find in other Smritis, especially in those that have full power now, that if the Shudras imitate the manner and customs of the Brahmins they do well, they ought to be encouraged.'⁶

Manu, who was a great worshipper of truth and condemned any kind of untruth, went on to list the conditions in which one may tell a lie. The most important of these conditions was to save the life of a person, irrespective of his or her caste. Telling lies was also permitted while getting one's daughter married off. The Holy Mother Sarada Devi did not tell the truth to Sri Ramakrishna about how much milk was being used to feed him. Later she told Golap Ma, 'A white lie for feeding one has nothing bad in it. I feed him by cajoling him thus.'⁷ Indeed it is customary all over the world to indulge in deception for the welfare of children and also for those who are in danger.

Then there is the concept of *apat* dharma, practices during an emergency, when one must give up one's set of religious practices to save one's life. Manu prescribes penances for such compromises. Manu believed in rebirth, but he treated life as extremely valuable. That is the reason he was willing to give licence even to immorality for saving one's life and for bringing new life on this earth.

This approach towards life is not something unique to Manu. We find in the Mahabharata the story of Vishvamitra, who stole the meat of a dead dog from the house of a chandala, outcaste, due to severe hunger during a famine. When reminded

of his dharma by the chandala, Vishvamitra argued that his life was much more important than his dharma. If he survived by eating the prohibited food, he could perform *prayaschitta*, penance, and go ahead with his journey of life; but if he died, it would be for a foolish cause!

Tribe and Morality

Was Manu right in defining law in this partisan way? Most judicial systems of the world like the British, French, American, and Indian believe in 'equality of all before justice'. Manu particularizes morality instead of generalizing it. It is unfortunate that we have come to associate punishment with suffering rather than penance and purification. When punishment is accepted with grace by the punished, it becomes penance for him or her. In turn, it takes the punished to the next level of spiritual evolution. This is the principle behind punishment and justice according to Manu.

This may seem surprising or even shocking to all those who have grown up with the generalized approach to law and justice. 'All are same before the law' has become a truism, although it has no significance anywhere. When one looks closely at the two approaches of generalization and particularization of values, one is bound to feel surprised at the honesty and the insight of Manu and the sheer dishonesty and hypocrisy of those who take a generalized approach.

To give an example, every society and religion values truth. And yet, every country has covert agents who are masters of lies and deception to find out the truth inside and outside the country. Are these spies punished in their own country for their lies and deception? Never. Why? Because every country professes generalization of values, but practises particularization of them.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'We often talk of right and justice, but we find that in the world right and justice are mere baby's talk' (1.59). This

kind of hypocrisy and the duplicity of the 'civilized world' and the 'chosen religion', whichever it may be, has done more harm to the world than the practical approach of Manu towards morality and punishment. Morality, ethics, and justice are always practised on the principle of tribe concerns, which can also be termed as 'in-group' ethics or 'tribe ethics'. Here 'tribe' means the group to which one intrinsically belongs.

A monk or a person living alone, away from any tribe, can indeed practise values without ever making any compromise. The *Mundaka Upanishad* instructs spiritual aspirants to stick constantly to truth, tapas, right knowledge, and brahmacharya. But this is difficult for a person who belongs to a 'tribe'. Socrates did not belong to a tribe, nor did Kant; that is why it was easy for them to preach and practise 'universal moral principles' with consistency.

Sri Ramakrishna's attitude, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, has to be seen in the light of personalized values. That is the only way to understand the true meaning and significance of values. Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji belonged to the 'in-group', and so their values during their interaction are unique to themselves. The direct disciples of the Master used to joke and tease each other in various ways, but that does not mean they interacted in the same way with others.

For evolved souls, who belong to some 'in-group', the judge for the rightness of their actions is their own conscience. But, what is the way out for common people who belong to the 'tribe' and whose conscience is not evolved? What about those who are driven mostly by selfish aims? Here Manu's greatness is displayed. At the time of Manu (c.200 BCE) a large number of outsiders, mainly from Central Asia, were getting admitted into Hindu society. Then there were the jatis, castes and sub-castes, of Hinduism. The whole country had literally lakhs of

'tribes', each having its own code of conduct and moral principles. A person of one class or profession would hesitate to cheat a member of the same class or profession, but would not hesitate to do the same with another belonging to a different class or profession.

Manu put a stop to all the confusion and divided people into four 'tribes', known as the four varnas. The varna system already existed, and so did the moral principles and the legal system. Manu simply did away with the ghetto 'tribe' mentality and broadened the mental horizon of all by forcing people to follow one of the four varnas. These four sets of morality and justice got rid of lakhs of 'tribe' practices by establishing many common laws and principles. That is how the 'Indian' identity was concretized by him.

Manu's code of conduct is essentially a manual to practise unselfishness. Manu knew that not everyone can be equally unselfish. Therefore, there can be neither a uniform civil code nor the same criminal laws for all. Even the same person may not act on the same principles of morality on which he or she had been acting for so long. In his compassionate understanding of people's weakness lies Manu's greatness. His Smriti takes people beyond the worldly ethics of Confucius and saves them from the impracticality of the idealism of ethics as preached by great philosophers like Kant.

Conclusion

Going through the succession of Smritis one can see that the lawgivers were conscious of the struggle of the downtrodden in order to move up through education and achievement. Whenever this mobility became more pronounced the lawgivers gave it legality and acceptability. It was thus that the untouchable became a fit candidate for the knowledge of Brahman, the highest goal of human life.

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Role of Libraries in Developing Rural India

Dr K R Leena

A COUNTRY'S PROGRESS DEPENDS upon the education its citizens receive. True social and economic stability is achieved through universal education, which is formal and informal. In India formal education was strictly pursued through textbooks until 1966, after which, due to many factors, there has been an emphasis on informal education as well. This shift has demanded a network of libraries through which early reading habits could be encouraged. Academic libraries mainly feed academic needs, but for an all-round development a wide range of reading material, provided mainly by public libraries, is essential. Public libraries are established not only for the distribution of books but also for other socioeconomic and cultural activities.

Education contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. The current educational system in India has to ensure the availability of a highly educated, trained, and motivated workforce capable of dealing with the challenges inherent in modernization and globalization. If India is to have real development, it has to compete with the most advanced countries in many fields. And public libraries play a prominent role in providing people with opportunities to look beyond their social, economic, moral, and spiritual issues and investigate how other cultures and countries address them. More than a century ago Swami Vivekananda said that education is the one panacea for most individual, social, and national problems. Swamiji directed his followers to reach the poor and illiterate in order to educate them both informally and formally.

Public Library and Rural Community

There is a close relation between a library and its community. Libraries do not function in a vacuum, they are determined by social forces. When social conditions change, the function of the library also changes. S C Behar says: 'The modern public library is a living force in the society where it functions with potentialities to determine its shape and quality. At the same time, it is also a product of that society. So, the library may be described as a social institution as well as a vital societal force.'¹

The public library possesses all the features of a social institution: social origin, social objectives, interrelation with other institutions, ability to adapt to new changes, and a functional organization. Being a social product a public library has certain functions to perform in the rural community. It has to acquire documents related to socio-rural needs and give reliable and essential information regarding sociocultural, educational, and economic activities suitable to a rural community. Besides, it should develop social cohesion by giving an opportunity for interaction between people belonging to different classes, castes, religions, and political parties. Rural libraries should encourage talents and help people learn social behaviour. The library cannot remain an isolated rigid institution, resisting various changes that affect the daily lives of people. W F Ogburn says: 'The library is a part of our social fabric and cannot remain independent and immutable amid social change, but as one of the social institutions, it must adapt itself to the social order as it changes.'²

It has been remarked that a public library has a 'social mandate' to serve the whole community. The rural community needs a library as a vital, creative, and active social force for its advancement. J H Shera says: 'The library is one element in the total communication system by which a society is held together and culture is created and maintained.'³ The developments in communications help support and accelerate a symbiotic relationship between the community and the library. A public library is a community centre around which the cultural life of the community revolves.

It is well known that a library has the obligation to mobilize its resources and those of the community in order to help people obtain necessary information to make intelligent choices and lead enlightened lives. Thus, a public library in a rural community is designated as a community resource centre, entrusted with social and educational functions. George Beaton remarks: 'It is difficult to predict what kind of library service is needed until you are definite about what the requirements of your users will be.'⁴ This indicates that the forms or methods of library services should be appropriate and match cultural traditions, thinking, and conduct of people. Significant differences exist between urban and rural areas regarding lifestyles, attitudes, values, and information needs. 'Rural people are less educated, poor, having less effective social organization and burdened with structural economic inequality.'⁵ To reduce the above disabilities libraries should have systematic dissemination of important information to specific social groups. Therefore, rural library services should focus on information regarding skills, resources, raw materials, market facilities, and policies of government services and programmes.

An important function of a public library is to improve the economic level of its community by providing not only books and periodicals

but also commercial, technical and other related information. In rural areas and particularly those in the Third World, the most urgent economic problem is to improve the production of agriculture. Yet, in many countries the farmers are not yet ready to use books and other printed sources of information. What they need is verbal advice and encouragement. Again, a substantial proportion of population in these countries are illiterate or at least not sufficiently literate to enjoy and profit by reading normal library material. It is idle for the librarians to disregard the limitations of this service.⁶

Libraries in rural areas have to give importance to improving the living standards of the community in which they exist, but most of them are mere centres for issuing books. This trend has to be changed. It has been observed that any profession needs interaction with its environment. From this interaction arises social responsibility. A library is also accountable to society, and the librarian is responsible for developing appropriate methods of services for the community.

The library should become a centre of information and inform and guide illiterate and semi-literate people on matters of their occupational interests and problems. The promotion of an information culture that involves activities designed to foster, from childhood, the habit of seeking information and using it as a problem-solving resource—at home and in school—would be a useful approach, especially in developing countries.

Libraries in rural communities should be an agent that encourage and support the use of group services, discussions, cooperative activities, and outreach programmes to deliver services to 'difficult to reach groups. They should closely co-operate with groups and institutions of educational importance.'⁷

The library's role in adult education is of paramount importance. Adult education fosters

development without regard to vocational value or personal abilities and aptitudes. It encourages social, moral, and intellectual responsibility within the framework of local and national citizenship. The contribution of adult education to development and social and economic changes are widely accepted today. 'We may define adult education as the effort put forth by a mature person to improve himself by acquiring new skills, information, understanding, attitude or appreciation, or the effort of any agency to present the opportunity and encouragement to mature persons for improving themselves or their community.'⁸ Adult education is also a process whereby persons, who no longer attend school on a regular full-time basis, undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in knowledge, understanding, skill appreciation, and aptitudes. It is also helpful in identifying and solving personal and community problems. UNESCO has been prominently advocating the idea of using public libraries in adult education promotional activities since 1949. The public library is described as a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a lifelong process. The public library manifesto of UNESCO points out 'the role of public library as a living force for education, culture and information and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and between nations.'⁹

The public library as a social institution works for greater enlightenment of people and gradually creates a climate in which it can flourish. Its



Apne Library, Wakro, Arunachal Pradesh

development as an efficient institution is conditioned by the level of the community's enlightenment. Therefore, a society obtains the library it deserves and reciprocally the library is a measure of the society's level of enlightenment. Every society needs libraries in order to keep available the records of human endeavour. The more sophisticated a society and the more complex its social organization, the more it needs libraries. A library becomes a potential force in the community's social and cultural life. Through various dimensions libraries can play a pivotal role in enriching people.

Human Resources Development

Libraries are called to play a pivotal role in the educational, scientific, industrial, social, and economic development of a country. This role came to be recognized only in the middle of the last century. The rural libraries in Kerala play a prominent role in all areas of social life. After independence and due to industrialization and a high literacy rate, libraries received support from the Kerala government to grow and become more active. 'The public libraries

have established themselves as an indispensable element in the life of the community. A well-organised library system can deeply influence the future development of the society.¹⁰

Cultural, educational, economic, and political improvement is a means for social development. The old ideas of development were one-sided; the new ideas of development are holistic. According to Rogers and Shoemaker, development means 'a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capita income and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organisation.'¹¹ According to the Mexico Declaration of UNESCO, the definition of a developed nation is 'one whose people are well-informed, cultured, efficient, productive, responsible and possess a sense of solidarity.'¹²

Public libraries in rural areas are centres for social reconstruction and not centres for revolution—development helps people of all categories become balanced, integrated, satisfied, and valued citizens. These characteristics are indispensable for encouragement, inspiration, and efficiency among community members. A public library in a village is a dynamic agency with the specific objective of developing the area in which it functions. According to S R Mittal, the objectives of a village library are: (i) disseminating authentic news and information; (ii) providing motivation for learning, reading, writing, and helping enhance literacy; (iii) helping maintain the cultural heritage; (iv) increasing vocational competence in raising the technological level of the village occupations; (v) promoting information for various sections of the village; (vi) helping village institutions and organizations improve their programmes; (vii) developing aesthetics; and (viii) helping people to spend their leisure time profitably.¹³

Books and other literature provide information and knowledge, besides developing character and personality. That is why it is pointed out that 'education is a process of meaningful interaction between a person and a stimulus resulting in changed behaviour beyond the level of simple reflex.'¹⁴ In a village mass education is essential and, in the absence of academic libraries, can be imparted through public libraries. Academic libraries are mostly concentrated in urban areas and are mainly meant for the educated masses. Books and other literature suitable to the village folk can be accumulated, preserved, and distributed only through public libraries. Therefore, a public library in a village is the cultural heart of that area. 'Whether a country is an affluent, advanced or a developing one, acquisition of knowledge is the very basis of progress and strength. The library preserves knowledge and kindles thoughts and ideas.'¹⁵

Empowering Rural Women

Rural women in India are, in many respects, backward in relation to urban women. Rural women lack facilities to improve their knowledge and are chained to traditionalism. There is a common saying: 'men for the field, women for the kitchen'. This was true for centuries, but educational, technological, cultural, economic, social, and political changes have forced rural women to respond strategically to the changing times. However, it is not absolutely correct to say that rural women have broken all the chains they are tied to. This is mainly because of the hesitation to undergo education due to reasons like male domination and vested interests, responsibility of the family, double-standards of morality, traditionalism, and customs. These factors are being slowly eradicated by increasing levels of education and a new philosophy of life among rural women. These changes also provide new avenues of employment to them.

Those who become educationally and economically independent, seek more freedom and voice in family affairs as well as in society. Thus, a village public library can contribute immensely by providing educational materials.

Housewives are dependent on information of every type to run their households in a modern way; information in assisting their children's education, preparing balanced diets, health, and first-aid during emergencies. Public libraries in such areas become the best resource centre for the distribution of literature. J J Thabali's study clearly indicates the need of libraries for women: 'Majority of the housewives depend on oral information handed down by their parents, in-laws, friends, neighbours as well as colleagues, to run their households. To some extent they also get information from the media and some of the housewives visit the library.'¹⁶ Most of them depend on relatives and friends for accessing information, mainly because of the lack of public libraries. The rural library has a pivotal role in providing the information women need. That is why P N Kaula says: 'Rural library authorities should take care of the book needs of women.'¹⁷

Indian feminist leaders have realized that their efforts are meaningless unless they attempt to make changes in response to the demands of education and health care in the lives of rural women, whose basic concerns are access to clean water, animal fodder, and cooking fuel. Many rural societies devalue education and the contributions of women by defining women primarily as domestic workers, sexual partners, and properties of men. Such societies assign priority to men's employment and income. This attitude can be changed by the public library system specifically meant for women. The attitude of women as a weaker section can be changed through dissemination of knowledge regarding various social evils that devalue them. Various


programmes can be conducted through village libraries to empower and help them lead a life of dignity in society. Economic independence, self-confidence, and a voice in their maternal capacities are a few of the tools that serve women well in negotiating their status in the family. Frequent access to public libraries can give women reliable information to enhance their status.

Special libraries for women could be run in villages by women alone. Such librarians know the real problems and strengths of the women and can thus direct activities suitable to their overall development.

Women are a significant group in any village. They have special needs in health and childcare, food and nutrition, cooking, family planning, and welfare. Kitchen gardens, dairy development, handicraft, and cottage industries can supplement family income. A library in a village is the best medium for the dissemination of knowledge regarding the above areas. Women in a village are often reluctant to go to a public library because it is usually dominated by men. It is natural that women in a village are not in a position to be free around men, as they are traditionally bound. The following are valuable suggestions to improve the situation of rural women: (i) development of reading habits; (ii) contribution to non-formal education, social awareness, and women empowerment; (iii) encouragement of social and cultural activities; (iv) support to women to become catalysts of social interaction; (v) counselling of young rural women to pursue education, career opportunities, library membership, and beneficial utilization of the library; (vi) inducement towards active participation in literacy campaigns, general awareness programmes, sociocultural organizations, and economic development for all age groups; (vii) involvement of governmental agencies to promote their schemes among villagers; (viii) organization of self-help

groups to encourage sharing of resources, campaigns against drugs and alcohol, reduction of crimes against women, generation of employment through various schemes, and provision of additional work for family members; (ix) facilitating access to information and communication technology and productive use of the Internet.

The role of libraries in the educational, social, and cultural development of rural women will be enhanced if the spiritual needs of the community are undertaken. Statistically, rural areas have a greater proliferation of places of worship because their spiritual needs are greater. Lectures and discourses on religious topics, pictorial books, documentaries, and other literature can help rural people develop the philosophical and other dimensions of their faiths, along with their natural devotion. As Swami Vivekananda stirringly says:

Bring all light into the world. Light, bring light! Let light come unto every one; the task will not be finished till every one has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the education of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord, for in the words of the same Lord, 'To work you have the right and not to the fruits thereof.'¹⁸ 

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Lest We Forget

William Page

SRI RAMAKRISHNA DECLARES that the purpose of human life is to realize God.¹ That makes people gulp. Till they had read this statement, they did not know the goal of life but just wanted to make money. Many after the first gulp say: 'Realize God? Oh, it is too hard and boring'; 'It takes too long, and there is no guarantee of success'; 'It is probably meant for monks and nuns'; 'Trying to realize God is an iffy proposition and a waste of time.'

It is true that realizing God is an ambitious undertaking. But those who write it off as too difficult and a waste of time reckon without God's grace. There is a common saying that if we take one step towards God, he will take a hundred steps towards us. Self-effort is necessary—but if we had to do all the work ourselves, we would never achieve our objective. Our minds may be riddled with flaws and stained by sins, but, God wishing, we can rectify the flaws, forgive the sins, remove the obstacles one by one, and finally approach him.

God has blessed all living beings with his indwelling presence. We become religious in the truest sense when we become aware of this presence. Then our work is to fan the spark of his presence through devotion, studying scriptures, singing hymns, keeping holy company, ritualistic worship, prayer, japa, and meditation. His grace can nurse it into a flame to light our way. He can even make the flame grow into a fire that will help light the way for others.

Put Away the Toys

Sri Ramakrishna tells us that God is like a mother.

So long as her children are happy playing with their toys, their mother will go about her household chores (149). And look at all the toys we have to play with nowadays! Televisions, computers, DVD players, MP3 players, iPhones, iPods, iPads, video games, the Internet—the list goes on and on. But Sri Ramakrishna tells us that if the children ever get tired of playing with their toys and cry for their mother, she will abandon her chores and run to hug them. Of course, sometimes they have to cry pretty long and loud. But the longer and the louder they cry, the tighter she will hug them when she finally comes.

Somebody once asked Swami Akhilananda: 'Well, swami, what's the point of all this prayer and japa and meditation? What do you get out of it?' Swami Akhilananda's face lit up with an indescribable glow and a beautiful smile, and he uttered just one word: 'Joy!' And that is exactly it. Experience shows that through prayer, japa, and meditation for an hour or more, great joy begins to come. Sometimes, when the mood is right, it comes even sooner. We feel God's presence rising from within us or surrounding us all around.


Obviously our devotional life will not get anywhere if we practise sadhana once a week for thirty seconds. God is not a one rupee coin that we can pick up in the street. He is a treasure. Like most treasures he is hidden, and we have to dig hard for him. The deeper we dig, the closer we will reach.

But nowadays everybody is too busy. Most of us are householders. We have too many professional and family responsibilities. In the morning we rush off to work after a quick breakfast. In the evening we are exhausted from a day of

being beaten up by the world. We just want to relax and play with our toys. There is no time for japa and meditation. A swami once said: 'No time means no interest.' If we want God, we have to *make* time. We have to be tough on ourselves. If we are overwhelmed by too many worries and responsibilities, we have to ignore some of them, push them aside, carve out a little space, and save a corner of our minds for God. Let us not short-change him. He has given us a whole lifetime—seventy, eighty, sometimes ninety years or more. We give hours of our time to our jobs and families; surely we can spare an hour or two a day for God. People who can spend some time meditating at least once a day, in addition to spiritual growth, can make their work a lasting success.

Feed the Ishta

Most of us have a mantra and an Ishta Devata, Chosen Ideal. It would be shameful to neglect this great gift. If our guru has given us a mantra and we do not use it, we are cheating the guru who gave it to us. If we have a Chosen Ideal and we do not pay attention to it, if we ignore it and let it gather dust within us, we might as well be slapping it in the face. We would not starve our child to death by not feeding it. The Chosen Ideal is like our child. We starve it when we do not feed it. With what food should we feed it? With loving attention, worship, prayers, japa, and meditation.


Joy and bliss belong to us. We do not need to search for what belongs to us and is within us. Let us worship, pray, repeat the mantra, and meditate on the Chosen Ideal for as long and as often as we can. And, as Sri Ramakrishna assures us, God will come. 

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In recent times the *Manu Smriti* is blamed for creating caste-based differences and also for being unfair towards lower castes and women. But most of these critics hardly read it, and those who read it, forget that Manu was just the chronicler and codifier of what existed in society more than a thousand years before Jesus Christ walked on earth. Rather, he should be credited for creating an environment of spiritual growth for all, despite the steel frame of social order.

Today the lawmakers of India pass a bill and in no time make amendments to it or repeal it. And here is Manu, whose laws are majestically dictating the personal and social life of India. By personalizing values and combining them with universal values Manu attempted to create in Hindu society a moral and judicial system more in tune with the human behaviour for all its members than with a general 'idealized' system. For an individual and also for a society to survive it is imperative to give up the hypocrisy of sticking only to universal moral values and the 'equality of all before justice', and instead admit the role of dynamic morality and justice in life. 

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Vivekananda's Social Ethics: Principles and Framework

Ruma Nath Choudhury and Umasankar Nath

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, the spiritual leader of modern India and rejuvenator of Hinduism, during his short span of thirty-nine years changed the course of national history. He arrived at a time when India's national confidence was at its lowest ebb under the British. He wept at the dismal state of the nation and worked to instil new ideals that would eradicate many of India's social ills. When Hinduism was criticized as archaic and socially irrelevant, Swamiji showed Indians and the world that this ancient religion and philosophy is consistent with the highest human ethics. In all his teachings and writings, Swamiji proclaimed the universality of Vedanta. His message was basically spiritual and philosophical, but had deep practical and social implications.

Practical Ethics

Swamiji has not written any treatise on ethics, but for him ethics was never divorced from religion. Therefore, in his writings and speeches we discover ethics in all its variety and applications. Moreover, his inspiring and wonderful life itself is a practical demonstration of ethics. The ethics visible in his life are systematic, practical, and social. When we speak of Swamiji's ethical ideas as systematic, it means that there is a metaphysical foundation to them; practical, because Swamiji's ethics are closely related to every movement of life; and social in the sense that its principles can be the foundation of every social system. When we speak of Swamiji's ethics as foundational it must be understood more in relation to the pressing issues on

which he spoke directly: poverty, illiteracy of the masses, uplift of the unprivileged classes, emancipation of women, and religious tolerance. Modern ethical issues like euthanasia, abortion, and so forth, which are also practical moral problems having social ramifications, can be understood through a deeper reading of how he interpreted Vedanta for the present age.

One of Swamiji's greatest works was to make the abstract Advaita Vedanta, long centred in the life of select monks, practical and universal. He institutionalized seva, service, based on a truly modern socio-religious philosophy, and is rightly spoken of as the one bringing Vedanta out of the forests, monasteries, and caves. Before Swamiji there was a chasm between high Advaita Vedanta abstractions and their relevance to practice, as he narrates anecdotally in 'Vedanta and Privilege' delivered in London:

If I ask one of our priests in India, 'Do you believe in Vedanta?'—he says, 'That is my religion; I certainly do; that is my life.' 'Very well, do you admit the equality of all life, the sameness of everything?' 'Certainly, I do.' The next moment, when a low-caste man approaches this priest, he jumps to one side of the street to avoid that man. 'Why do you jump?' 'Because his very touch would have polluted me.' 'But you were just saying we are all the same and you admit there is no difference in souls.' He says, 'Oh, that is in theory only for householders; when I go into a forest, then I will look upon everyone as the same.'¹

To Swamiji the essence of all ethics is the

perception and the feeling of being one with the universe. He says: 'Behind everything the same divinity is existing, and out of this comes the basis of morality. Do not injure another. Love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself. From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality which has been summed up in one word—self-abnegation' (1.364). With this metaphysical basis we can understand and approach ethics through the framework of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Liberty • Swamiji puts great emphasis on liberty as a social principle. To him: 'Liberty is the first condition of growth. Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress, marriage, and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others' (4.367–8). India gave liberty in spiritual matters and so religion grew, but India put chains on society, which stunted its growth. Liberty in social matters would release the power of the people and help society advance to a new level of growth. In an interesting comparison between the Hindus and the Westerners he blames each for their one-sidedness: 'The Greek sought political liberty. The Hindu has always sought spiritual liberty. Both are one-sided. The Indian cares not enough for national protection or patriotism, he will defend only his religion; while with the Greek and in Europe (where the Greek civilization finds its continuation) the country comes first. To care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is still greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for' (6.86).

Equality • Much like the idea of liberty Swamiji believed in equality. Equality is absolute sameness or oneness in the Advaitic sense of final realization, and this should be reflected in social equality. All other ideas of equality will always be flawed because they are built on

partial generalization and will be open to some form of exclusiveness and discrimination. He, however, praised Islam for preaching its ideal of equality, at least within its religious brotherhood, while Hindus spoke of equality and never implemented it. Swamiji gave his own guru's life as an example by saying:

As I have told you, whenever he [Sri Ramakrishna] wanted to do anything he never confined himself to fine theories, but would enter into the practice immediately. We see many persons talking of the most wonderfully fine things about charity and about equality and the rights of other people and all that, but it is only in theory. I was so fortunate as to find one who was able to carry theory into practice. He had the most wonderful faculty of carrying everything into practice which he thought was right (4.174).

Fraternity • Among the modern democratic principles that Swamiji upholds is the principle of fraternity. Broadly it means the state or feeling of friendship and mutual support within a group oriented towards a common purpose that can be religious, social, national, financial, or the like. The best fraternity is the fraternity of the whole humankind, as it bonds all people and shifts the emphasis from God, or society, or nation, or money to the human being. Universal fraternity is the belief in human capacities, the affirmation of the sanctity of the human being, and the ability of humans to live in dignity. Here once again Swamiji brings in Sri Ramakrishna to press his point: 'He would have you cease talking about love for your brother, and set to work to prove your words' (4.187). Fraternity entails much sacrifice and renunciation, and the principal renunciation is that of one's ego and old habits that try to make us separate from other group of people.

Seva and Social Ethics

Swamiji's principles and framework of social

ethics come to life through seva. In order to implement seva and also for it to become a living force, he himself became a role model by inculcating it among his brother disciples as well as his disciples. It is often stated that when the sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order first started seva, people were amazed to see them doing all kinds of works, as this went against the traditional image of the sannyasin, who cut himself away from all social concerns and pursued the ultimate spiritual goal in isolation. Although the principle and practice of seva already existed in Indian religions, this tradition of serving God and devotees became revolutionary under Swamiji's orientation. Traditional seva became worship of God in humans, and seva began to be considered the sadhana of the age that can lead us to moksha. Swamiji says: 'This is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples' (3.142–3). Swamiji's ideal of seva is in tune with the highest social ethics and with the metaphysical ideal of oneness, which is expressed through liberty, equality, and fraternity, the basic concepts of modern society.

Swamiji made it clear that if India neglected religion, her backbone would be soon broken. But this backbone, which had saved India over the centuries and made her survive all vicissitudes, would have to include modern developments and some of the values that made Western nations progressive. All his revolutionary principles of social ethics appear filtered and reworked through the prism of India's spiritual heritage. India would have to step out of its social bondages, while for the West Swamiji emphasized religious freedom.

His ideas of modernity are not to be confused with materialism, for materialism is exploitative and inhuman in its practices. Swamiji worked hard and travelled all over the world to spread these ideas, for he loved God and humankind and considered them to be one. Seva awakens divinity in those who serve, and the served is elevated to the status of God. He defines his life mission in these words: 'The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopeless intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work' (5.104–5).

Swamiji was a perfect reformer who did not break anything but reoriented humankind to a higher ideal, an ideal which is accessible and practicable. There are different interpretations of the philosophy that Swamiji preached, but no one doubts that he was the epitome of his message.



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All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr So-and-so; he has acquired infinite expansion. The little personality which he had before is now lost to him for ever; he has become infinite, and the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.109

Euthanasia: Ethical Implications

Dr Vinitha Mohan

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT public policy debates today surrounds the issue of euthanasia. It is a controversial subject of ethical concerns as there are many moral dilemmas associated with it. Euthanasia is the intentional killing, by act or omission, of a dependent human being for his or her alleged benefit. The term euthanasia comes from the Greek words *eu* and *thanatos*, which combined means 'well death' or 'dying well'. Euthanasia is the practice of ending the life of a person painlessly. Also known as mercy killing or assisted suicide, it is usually practised on a terminally ill person. Euthanasia may be legal or illegal, depending upon a country's laws.

Whether euthanasia should be considered murder is not just a matter for legislators but is a serious question for humanity. The definition of euthanasia seems to be simple, but the concept associated with it and proposed by its adherents is complex and has profound consequences for all. At present one of the most debated topics concerns the legalization of euthanasia. Some people are of the view that life is sacred and no one has the right to end it; others say that life belongs to oneself and therefore each person has the right to decide what to do with it, even if it amounts to dying. Our interest in following our convictions at the end of our life, a result of making intimate and personal choices for oneself, is so crucial that a failure to protect this particular interest would undermine the general human right altogether.

In modern society, in which even the fundamental values of human life are often called into

question, cultural change exercises an influence upon the way of looking at suffering and death; moreover, advancement in medical science has increased the capacity to cure and prolong life, which sometimes gives rise to moral problems.¹ Proponents of euthanasia believe that it is everyone's right to die in the manner and at the time of one's own choosing when faced with terminal illness, rather than excessively suffer till the bitter end. Opponents argue that euthanasia cannot be a matter of self-determination and personal beliefs, because it is an act that requires two people to make it possible and a complicit society to make it acceptable. They consider euthanasia the equivalent of murder, which is against the law in every civilized society, and that medicine and law are the 'principal institutions that maintain respect for human life in a secular pluralistic society'. They accuse proponents of euthanasia of wanting to make death a purely technical issue, of stripping it of all its humanity, and allowing us to control the time, place, and manner of our death to make it as cheap and efficient as possible.²

Classification of Euthanasia

The practice of medically assisted death may be conducted with or without consent, which are termed voluntary and involuntary euthanasia respectively. Since involuntary euthanasia is conducted without the specific acquiescence of the individual, some equate it to murder.³ Involuntary euthanasia may be conducted when the person is incapable of making a decision and is thus left to a proxy. Euthanasia by proxy consent is a

highly controversial subject, especially for the reason that multiple proxies may claim the authority to decide for the patient.

Voluntary euthanasia is controversial for the following reasons. Euthanasia may be conducted passively, non-aggressively, and aggressively. Passive euthanasia entails the withholding of common treatments such as antibiotics, analgesics, or surgery, or the administration of strong medications such as morphine to relieve pain, knowing that this may also result in death. Non-aggressive euthanasia entails the withdrawing of life support and is more controversial. We can cite the case of Terri Schiavo, a Floridian who had been in a vegetative state since 1990 and had her feeding tube removed in 2005. Her husband, facing government roadblocks and social controversy, won the right to take her off life support, which he claimed she would have wanted but was difficult to confirm as she had no living will and the rest of her family claimed otherwise.

Aggressive euthanasia entails the use of lethal substances or forces to kill and is the most controversial. Prior to and during World War II the Nazis in Germany carried out an involuntary euthanasia programme in secret. In 1939 Nazis, in what was code-named 'Action T4', killed children under three who showed signs of mental retardation, physical deformity, or other debilitating problems, which they considered gave the disabled child 'a life unworthy to be lived'. This was done as part of the Nazis' eugenics programme under the belief that by doing away with children born physically and mentally challenged they could raise a superior Aryan race.⁴

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

If a third person performs the last act that intentionally causes a patient's death, euthanasia has occurred. On the other hand, if the person who dies performs the last act that leads to his

or her death, with the help of another, it can be termed as assisted suicide. For example, when a person swallows an overdose of drugs that has been provided by a doctor for the purpose of causing death, it is assisted suicide. Similarly, if a patient pushes a switch to trigger a fatal dose of injection after the doctor has inserted an intravenous needle into the patient's vein, it is assisted suicide.

The first group to plead for legalization of euthanasia, called the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, was formed in 1935 by a group of doctors in London. In 1938 a similar organization, known as the Hemlock Society, was established in the United States. It is estimated that there are at present more than 60,000 members registered in this society.⁵ There have been many cases of physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia fought in the court. In 1935 Harold Blazer was arrested for performing euthanasia on his daughter, who had been suffering from cerebral spinal meningitis for more than thirty years. During the trial, however, he was acquitted of the charges.

In 1986 another doctor, Joseph Hussmann, was found guilty of administering a lethal dose of Demerol to his mother-in-law. He was fined and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for the act. In 1999 euthanasia became a public issue with the imprisonment of Dr Jack Kevorkian, a Michigan physician who conducted voluntary euthanasia on Thomas Youk, a fifty-two year old patient in the final stage of his amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Dr Jack Kevorkian became infamous for encouraging and assisting people in committing suicide, which resulted in a Michigan law being passed against the practice. Dr Kevorkian helped many long suffering and terminally ill patients to die, until he was tried and convicted in 1999 for an assisted suicide displayed on television. Dr Kevorkian was charged with second-degree murder and served

eight years in prison—from 1999 to 2007. It is claimed that he had administered euthanasia for at least one hundred and thirty other patients, who themselves took a lethal injection.

In 1995, with the passage of the 'Rights of the Terminally Ill Act', Australia's northern territory became the only jurisdiction in the world with both legalized assisted suicide and euthanasia. The law was in effect only for eight months. During that time four deaths occurred under its assisted suicide provision. Dr Philip Nitschke was listed as the certifying physician under the law and facilitated all the four deaths. The method used to end the lives was described as 'death by laptop'. Dr Nitschke made house calls and carried his laptop computer, plastic tubing, and pump driven syringe filled with barbiturates. The computer was equipped with an interactive suicide software program. The patient was hooked up to an intravenous line connected to the computer and the program was turned on; a series of three questions appeared on the computer screen:

(i) Are you aware that if you go ahead to the last screen and press the 'yes' button, you will be given a lethal dose of medicine and die? Yes/No

(ii) Are you certain that you understand that if you proceed and press the 'yes' button on the next screen, you will die? Yes/No

(iii) In fifteen seconds you will be given a lethal injection. Yes/No

Clicking 'yes' for each of the three questions activated a syringe driver and a sequential delivery of death inducing drugs. The method meant that the doctor did not directly administer the fatal dose.⁶

In 1994 Oregon voters approved the 'Death with Dignity Act', permitting doctors to assist terminal patients with six months or less to end their lives. In 1999 non-aggressive euthanasia was permitted in Texas. In 1993 the Netherlands decriminalized doctor-assisted suicide. In

2002 physician assisted suicide was approved in Belgium. As of 2011 active euthanasia is only legal in the three Benelux countries: the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and in the US states of Washington, Oregon, and Montana.

Reasons in Favour and Against

The following are the reasons in favour of voluntary euthanasia.

Freedom of Choice • Supporters of voluntary euthanasia argue that choice is a fundamental principle in all liberal democracies. Hence, the right to die is a freedom of choice.

Quality of Life • The pain and suffering a person feels during disease, even with pain relievers, can be incomprehensible to a person who has not gone through it. Even without considering the physical pain, it is often difficult for patients to overcome the emotional pain of losing their independence.

Economic Costs and Human Resources • The energy of doctors and the hospital beds could be used for people whose lives could be saved instead of continuing the life of those who want to die.

Social Pressure • All the arguments against voluntary euthanasia create a terrible and continuing psychological pressure on the judgement of those who prefer to end their lives instead of living in suffering for years. One example of this is the risky and painful methods—like hanging and the like—used by those who genuinely wish to die.

Sociobiology Concerns • Genetic relatives may seek to keep an individual alive against the individual's will. More liberal voluntary euthanasia policies would empower the individual to counteract any biased interest on the part of relatives. Supporters of euthanasia accept that the right to decide on one's own death may be

manipulated by third persons, but they point out that almost any individual freedom involves some risk of abuse and argue that such risks can be kept to a minimum by using proper legal safeguards. Furthermore, merely because the risk of abuse of a right exists is no reason to deny a person the right itself.

The following are the reasons against voluntary euthanasia.

Professional Role • Critics argue that voluntary euthanasia could unduly compromise the professional roles of health care employees, especially doctors. It undermines the commitment of doctors and nurses to save lives. The Hippocratic Oath, in its ancient form, excluded euthanasia: 'To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug nor give advice which may cause his death.' However, since the 1970s this oath has largely fallen out of use.

Theological Position • Voluntary euthanasia is often rejected as a violation of the sanctity of human life. Some theologians and religious thinkers consider it as a sinful act, as unjustified killing.

Feasibility of Implementation • Euthanasia can be considered 'voluntary' only if a patient is mentally competent to make the decision and has a rational understanding of the options and consequences. Competence can be difficult to determine or even define. Thus, it might not be in a person's best interests.

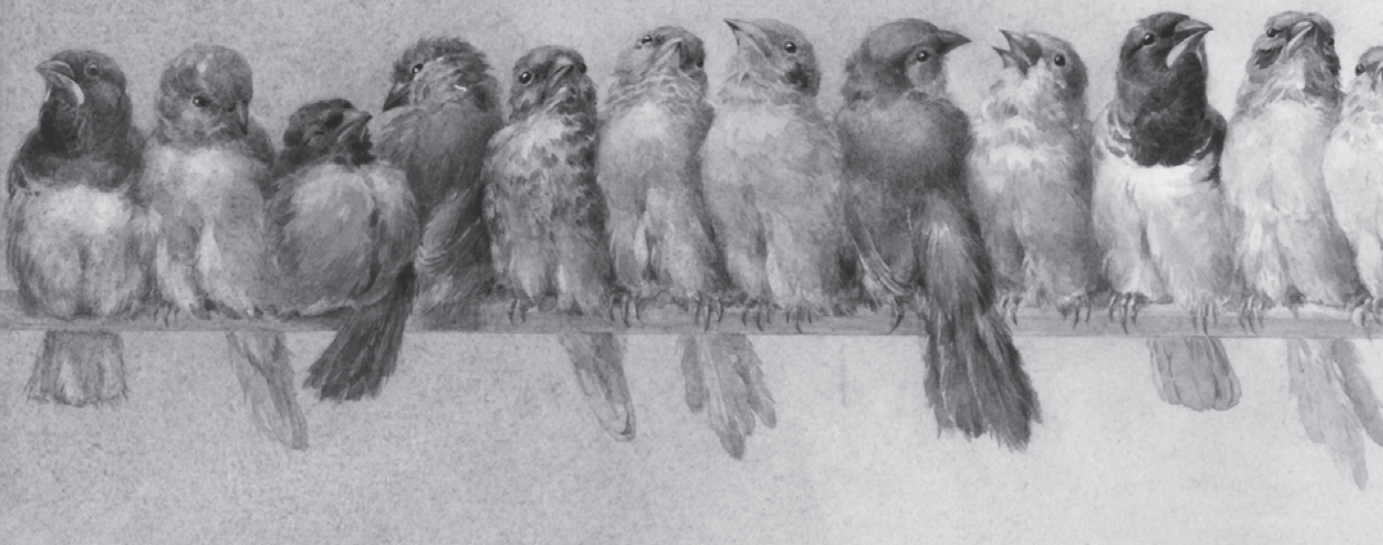
Necessity • If there is some reason to believe that the cause of a patient's illness or suffering is or will be curable, then correct action is sometimes considered in attempting to bring about a cure or engaging in palliative care.

Wishes of Dear Ones • Family members often desire to spend as much time with their loved relatives as possible before they die. Thus, it affects other people's rights, not just those of the patient's.

Consent under Pressure • Given the economic grounds for voluntary euthanasia, critics are concerned that patients may experience a psychological pressure to consent to voluntary euthanasia rather than be a financial burden on their families.⁷

Laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide are in place to prevent abuse and to protect people from unscrupulous doctors and opportunists. Would not euthanasia and assisted suicide be only at a patient's request? Euthanasia proponents seek to have euthanasia and assisted suicide considered 'medical treatment'. If it be so, it would not only be inappropriate but discriminatory to deny this right to a person solely because that person is too young or mentally incapacitated to request it. Suppose, however, that surrogates were not permitted to choose death for another and that doctors could not end patients' lives without their request. The fact still remains that subtle, even unintended, pressure would still be unavoidable. Such was the case with Kate Cheney, an eighty-five years old woman who died under Oregon's assisted suicide law. Kate Cheney reportedly had been suffering from early dementia. After she was diagnosed with cancer, her own physician declined to provide a lethal prescription for her. Psychiatrists found that she was not eligible for assisted suicide either, as she was not explicitly pushing for it. She was then taken to a psychologist who said that she was competent but possibly under the influence of her daughter, who was 'somewhat coercive'. Finally, a managed care ethicist who was overseeing her case determined that she was qualified for assisted suicide, and the lethal drugs were prescribed.

From the ethical point of view, the situation looks scary. It seems to be against medical and human ethics. It gives us the idea that a terminally ill patient, who seems to be having no



chance of recovery, would be better off dead. The patient may also be influenced by the ideas of physicians, relatives, and friends in favour of euthanasia. This leads to a dangerous moral situation. Under these circumstances euthanasia turns out to be an act of convenience.

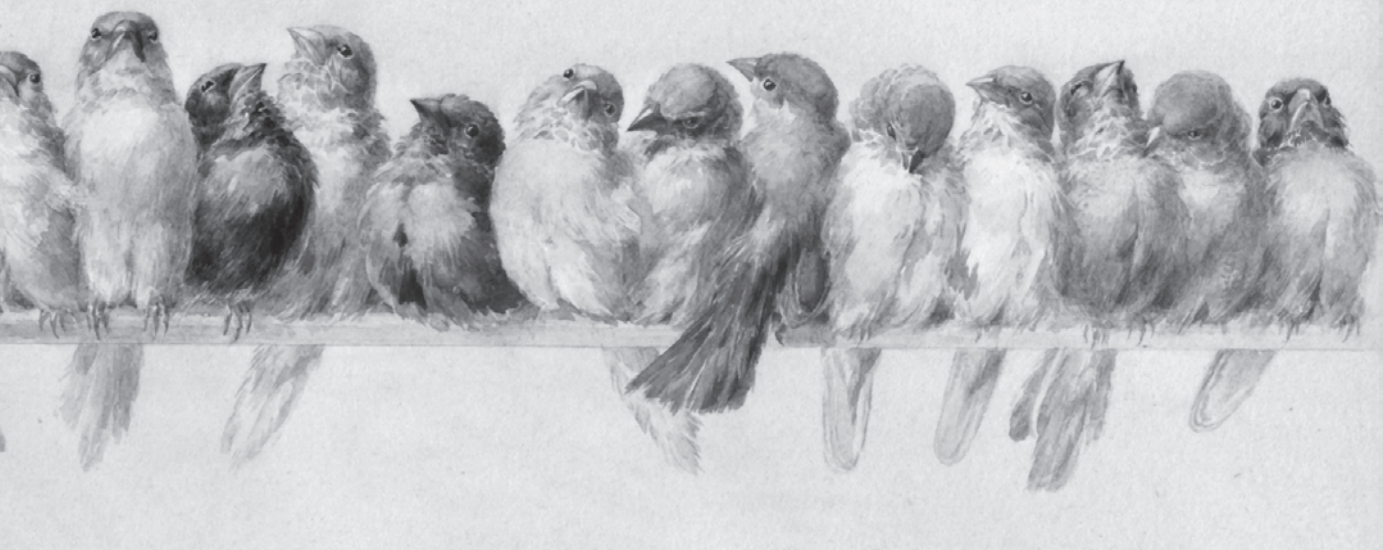
An Ethical Outlook

When a person is in excruciating pain, the right action would be to admit the patient to a clinic where competent pain specialists along with trained psychologists could lessen the patient's physical pain and mental stress. When the pro-euthanasia people demand the right to assisted suicide, what others are concerned about is not conceding a right to the person who chooses to die, but authorizing someone to do the killing. In other words, euthanasia is not about the right to die, it is about the right to kill. Euthanasia is not about giving rights to a person who prefers to die, but about changing the law and public policy so that doctors, relatives, and others can directly and intentionally end another's life. A person may commit suicide, but this is a tragic individual act.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide supporters continue to push their agenda throughout the

world to make death-on-demand acceptable and legal. Often such advocates hold positions of great influence. Many are known as experts in medical ethics. Baroness Mary Warnock, who is universally referred to as Britain's leading medical ethics expert, explains that it is better for elderly people to kill themselves than to be a burden on their family and society. 'I don't see what is so horrible about the motive of not wanting to be an increasing nuisance,' she says. These words emphasize the necessity in maintaining laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide. A statement made against assisted suicide by members of the Michigan's Religious Leaders Forum, a group of Christian, Jew, and Muslim leaders, states: 'Those who promote this last fatal escape as a "right" may quickly become an expectation and, finally, even a "duty" to die. We fear eventually some individuals and families will be forced to put financial concerns above the needs of loved ones.'⁸

Euthanasia is not about a private act, but about letting one person facilitate the death of another. And this is a matter of public concern, since it can lead to tremendous abuse, exploitation, and erosion of care for the most vulnerable



people among us. In a time when continued attempts to cure a person is unsound, a hospice, including an in-home hospice, can be of help. All efforts should be placed on making the patient's remaining life comfortable. The world medical community considers both euthanasia and assisted suicide to be in conflict with the basic ethical principles of medical practice. The World Medical Association has adopted strong resolutions condemning both practices and urging all national medical associations and physicians to refrain from participating in them, even if their national law allows or decriminalizes these practices. 'Euthanasia, that is the act of deliberately ending the life of a patient ... is unethical. This does not prevent the physician from respecting the desire of a patient to allow the natural process of death to follow its course in the terminal phase of sickness.'⁹

Individual liberty is the hallmark of any free society; therefore, we should consider here the rights that accrue to each individual in such cases.

Euthanasia in the Indian Context

The demise of the twenty-five years old Andhra youth K Venkatesh, in December 2004, who

wanted to be given euthanasia so that he could donate his organs, has sparked the debate on the legalization of euthanasia in India. He sought the right to die, not to escape the suffering from his degenerative muscular dystrophy but to be able to donate his vital organs, as doctors had warned that these could not be used once they became infected. The Andhra Pradesh High Court rejected his mother's plea. K Venkatesh died after a futile wait for the court to accept his plea for euthanasia, and his mother vowed to keep up the fight for a change in the 'Human Organ Transplant Act'.¹⁰

Mahatma Gandhi, the great proponent of non-violence, opined about euthanasia in the October 1928 Gujarati weekly *Navjivan*: 'Just as a surgeon does not commit himsa when he wields his knife on his patient's body for the latter's benefit, similarly one may find it necessary under certain imperative circumstances to go a step further and sever life from the body in the interest of the sufferer.'¹¹

Passive euthanasia is legal in India. On 7 March 2011 the Supreme Court of India legalized passive euthanasia by means of withdrawal of life support to patients in a permanent

vegetative state. The decision was made as part of the verdict in a case involving Aruna Shanbaug, who has been in a vegetative state for thirty-seven years at King Edward Memorial Hospital. The high court rejected active euthanasia by means of lethal injection. In the absence of a law regulating euthanasia in India, the court stated that its decision becomes the law of the land until the Indian parliament enacts a suitable law. Active euthanasia, including the administration of lethal compounds for the purpose of ending life, is still illegal in India and in most countries. India's Supreme Court ruled that life support can be removed for some terminally ill patients, allowing what is being called 'passive euthanasia'.¹²

The Supreme Court rejected the plea of Shanbaug and a journalist demanding that she should not be fed and be allowed to die with dignity. The journalist, who has written a book about her, said she was virtually dead. In a report to the court doctors who were caring for her said that she responded by facial expressions. The Supreme Court said that Shanbaug could not make the demand on her behalf. Shanbaug's parents had died many years ago and she had not been in touch with other relatives. But in a significant observation the Supreme Court said that doctors and nurses could petition to remove life support for some terminally ill patients, provided the request is supervised by High Courts. The court said that the so-called 'active euthanasia' is illegal, though 'passive euthanasia', which essentially means the removal of life support, is permissible. Many lawyers and doctors have expressed their support for the Supreme Court's ruling on passive euthanasia. They say that this decision would help some terminally ill patients. The ruling is likely to spark a fresh debate on the subject. There are some concerns that it could be misused if legalized.

Cancer specialist Dr P Jagannath called it a progressive judgement that provided patients with an option. Many felt the judgement only underlined what is one of the medical world's best known secret. 'Passive euthanasia has anyway been practiced in our country,'¹³ said Dr Nagaraj Huilgol, a consultant radiologist who has worked for years for the 'death with dignity' movement in the country. Prashant Bhushan, a senior Supreme Court lawyer commenting on Aruna Shanbaug case says that 'the right to live is the right to live with dignity. If you can't live with dignity, life really has no meaning. If you are forced to live a life of indignity or great suffering, then that clearly violates your right to life.'¹⁴


The debate in the ethics literature on euthanasia is just as divided as the debate on physician-assisted suicide, perhaps more so. Slippery-slope arguments are often made, supported by claims about abuse of voluntary euthanasia in the Netherlands. ... Arguments against it are based on the integrity of medicine as a profession. In response, autonomy and quality-of-life-base arguments are made in support of euthanasia, underscored by claims that when the only way to relieve a dying patient's pain or suffering is terminal sedation with loss of consciousness, death is a preferable alternative—an argument also made in support of physician-assisted suicide.¹⁵

According to Dr Jack Kevorkian, a strong advocate of euthanasia, terminal illness is any disease that curtails life even for a day. Such a definition shows the ambiguity of the term 'euthanasia'. And medical experts have acknowledged that it is virtually impossible to predict the life expectancy of a particular individual. It has to be emphasized here that the issue hovers around an invaluable asset called *life*. Just as a mistaken diagnosis is possible, so is a mistaken prognosis. It must be remembered that death is final and a chance of error too great to approve the practice of euthanasia.

The following lines of Dame Cicely Saunders,

founder of the hospice movement, highlight the significance of human existence: 'You matter because you are you. You matter to the last moment of your life, and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die.'¹⁶

Experts denouncing the legalization of euthanasia insist that it must not be allowed in a country where there is no strong social system to support the old and destitute. People might exploit this law to fulfil their selfish interests.

The above inferences lead to one irresistible conclusion: that any form involving unnatural termination of life, whether euthanasia or assisted suicide, is considered to be denigrating the value of human life. If one is considered to be a burden to society or friends or relatives because one has become too ill to take care of oneself and is driven to a desperate feeling that makes one lose all hope, then it can be said that the society where one lives in has sunk into the abyss of moral degeneration. The moral responsibility of the medical fraternity and others close to a patient is not to think that finishing a life is the only solution, but to give the patient psychological strength as well as moral and spiritual support to cope with the natural predicament that he or she is in, and to assure that the patient's life is a precious one. 

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Dispelling the Shadow of Death

Tapas Mukherjee

ALL FORMS OF LIFE in this world have to continuously struggle for survival. For humans struggles are not only physical but also mental, moral, intellectual, and spiritual, all depending on one's level of evolution. The more we struggle, the greater we evolve and gain experience. Ideally, our experiences should slowly lead us to spirituality and immortality, but we find that most of our struggles are constantly followed by the shadows of suffering, doubt, fear, and death. We take these shadows as real and therefore they drag and keep us down, rendering us powerless to dispel them. This state of existence comes as a result of clinging to the body-identity. The body is held by death and cannot be immortal, while the essence of our being, the Atman, is spiritual and deathless. We fight the whole world in order to preserve and expand the various symbols of body-identity instead of struggling to transcend them and conquer death.

Message of the Bhagavadgita

The Gita opens on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where the armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas stand arrayed and ready for war. The blind king Dhritrashtra asks Sanjaya to describe what his sons, the Kauravas, and his nephews, the Pandavas, are doing. The teachings, in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, could have been given in more favourable and happy circumstances than before an imminent war with all its din and terror. But by teaching the great metaphysical truths on the battlefield Sri Krishna is hinting that these teachings are practical and can be undertaken in the most unfavourable

circumstances. The Gita, in other words, addresses a person determined to regain his or her forgotten divinity by struggling to overcome the delusions of the body-identity. The proper means are taught in the form of different yogas, which are to be taken up by persons of different temperaments. It thus describes the experiences that invariably come to all spiritual seekers. The purpose of the Gita is moksha, liberation, which consists in the complete cessation of the transmigration of the soul by tackling the causes of this transmigration.

The Dharma Shastras, treatises on dharma, keeping in mind that the world is experienced according to the mental and physical capacity of the experiencer, has enjoined different duties to different people. Dharma has always been relative to place, time, and person. For example, it is the dharma of a saint to be same-sighted towards all and of a judge to uphold justice by protecting the innocent and punishing the evil-doer. To kill an enemy during war is the dharma of a soldier, but to kill a person due to rage, enmity, or hatred is murder and is adharma. Therefore, what is dharma in one situation and context is adharma in a different situation and context. Arjuna, a heroic warrior, wanted to flee from the battle with the excuse that war kills wantonly; he considered it better to renounce his dharma and take up the dharma of a mendicant, which was not his. This was abandoning *svadharma*, one's dharma, through error and delusion. The sages further teach that the essence of *svadharma* is *nishkama* karma, selfless work. Another higher aspect of *svadharma*, declared to be the goal for every individual, is to realize God. *Nishkama*


karma leads to the purification of the mind and the eradication of all obstacles towards moksha.

The first words of the Gita are: '*Dharma-kshetre kuru-kshetre*; on the sacred field of Kuru-kshetra.' This is uttered by Dhritarashtra, who is described as a wise man but blinded by attachment towards his sons and his kingdom. He is not only physically blind but spiritually too, as he is gripped by the body-identity, which brings doubts, fears, and death. When attachments reign supreme, they destroy dharma and discernment of what is right and wrong in a particular situation. In cases like Dhritarashtra's we call it love, though it is self-hypnotization only. Through these few words Dhritarashtra shows his fear and apprehension about the outcome of the war.

Kurukshetra, the place where the battle is to be fought, is also interpreted as 'the source of coming into being of merit that did not exist before and the increase of merit that existed, as a field is of grains.'¹ Symbolically, the human body is the *dharma-kshetra* and *kuru-kshetra*, the sacred field in which dharma is performed and where we have the opportunity to produce merit that did not exist before and increase our pre-existing merit. Spiritual thoughts, words, and deeds are like seeds we sow to later reap the cessation of birth and death; but if we sow the seeds of worldliness, we reap bondage and suffering. The *dharma-kshetra* is sacred and meant for spirituality, not for worldliness. This is the reason why the human body is considered the best vehicle to realize the highest *purushartha*, human goal, which is liberation.

'*Samaveta yuyutsava mamakah pandavas chaiva kim-akurvata sanjaya*; O Sanjaya, what did my sons and Pandu's sons do when they assembled eager for battle.' Since the question 'in the form of "what did my sons do?"' would have been sufficient, Dhritarashtra by separately mentioning "and Pandu's sons (and others)" indicates the absence of the idea of "mine" with regard to

the Pandavas, and thereby displaying hostility towards them' (ibid.). *Mamakah*, my, characterizes the body-identity and its creation, so very hard to eradicate. The *buddhi* is the battlefield where the two forces of dharma and adharma constantly battle for supremacy. The ego, which says 'mine', like Dhritarashtra's, is born blind and has a blind attachment to what it considers its own. The blind ego, which has built its world through much toil and trouble, fights and struggles to retain it when faced by its destroyers, who are guided by Sri Krishna. Bhagavan, as the inner voice and controller, is higher and stronger than the ego.

As we struggle in life and face crises of all kinds it is always better to take refuge in Sri Krishna, our inner Self, than to follow the blind Dhritarashtra, the ego. Arjuna came ready for war but became confused about his dharma; he wanted to give it up and flee. Then Sri Krishna taught him what dharma and adharma are, and Arjuna was able to dispel his doubts, his despondency. The negative forces in the *buddhi* are bound to a blind ego that death stalks; the positive forces have Bhagavan as an ally. By taking refuge in him and his teachings we overcome death and become immortal. 

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Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness. When this superconscious state is reached, man becomes free and divine; death becomes immortality, weakness becomes infinite power, and iron bondage becomes liberty. That is the goal, the infinite realm of the superconscious.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.35

Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels

Somenath Mukherjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

SS Rubattino

THE ROUTE OF the *Rubattino* was Genoa or Palermo-(Marseilles)-Naples-Bombay-Singapore-Djakarta (Batavia)-Hong Kong. The full name of the ship was *Raffaele Rubattino* and it belonged to the Navigazione Generale Italiana. Here we need to include the pertinent history from a book. 'The two companies, Florio of Palermo and Rubattino of Genoa, that dominated Italian Mediterranean shipping, merged in 1881 to form the Navigazione Generale Italiana (NGI), which then held a virtual shipping monopoly. ... In 1893 NGI contracted with the state for the lines for Sicily, Malta, Sardinia, Tripoli, Tunisia, Egypt, the Red Sea, and India.'⁹⁹ But unlike the other shipping companies we have hitherto been dealing with, the Navigazione Generale Italiana has a different history, which centres around its illustrious founder Raffael Rubattino (1810–81):

[The] shipping industry pioneer, patriot, and advocate of colonial expansion, was born in Genoa to a well-off merchant family. He completed his secondary education in his native city, joined Mazzini's YOUNG ITALY, and started several business ventures that also served his political interests. His interest in maritime commerce began as an insurer in 1837. He founded his own shipping company in 1838, and in 1841 started a transportation business between Genoa and Milan. In addition to moving people and goods, Rubattino also smuggled propaganda and political suspects. He was the first Italian ship owner to commit his company to steam navigation. After expanding his

activities in the Mediterranean until 1848, Rubattino looked to the Atlantic trade. With the help of Cavour and financial subsidy from the Piedmontese government, in 1852 Rubattino launched the Transatlantic Shipping Company. The merger of Rubattino's company with the shipping business run by the Florio family of Sicily resulted in the formation of *Navigazione Generale Italiana* (1881), Italy's largest shipping organization. Rubattino never separated his business from his political interests. One of his ships transported CARLO PISACANE's ill-fated expedition of 1857 to Naples, and two of his ships transported GUISEPPE GARIBALDI's Thousand on their luckier venture to Sicily in 1860. Rubattino's degree of complicity in these ventures is still the subject of debate. In 1869 Rubattino purchased the Bay of Assab concession on the Red Sea that, when acquired by the government in 1882, served as the point of penetration for Italian COLONIALISM.¹⁰⁰

Regarding the ship *Rubattino* we did not find more than some scanty information. Apart from the name of her owner, we learned that the 4,337-ton ship was built in 1882 by the Palmer's Shipbuilding & Iron Company Ltd, Jarrow (1865–1933) in North-East England.¹⁰¹ In 1910 the *Rubattino* was transferred to the Società Nazionale dei Servizi Marittimi.¹⁰² But this limited information is more than compensated for the reminiscence of Harvey Reeves Calkins, a missionary who accompanied Vivekananda on the *Rubattino* and was blessed by the latter's close acquaintance.¹⁰³

The Journey

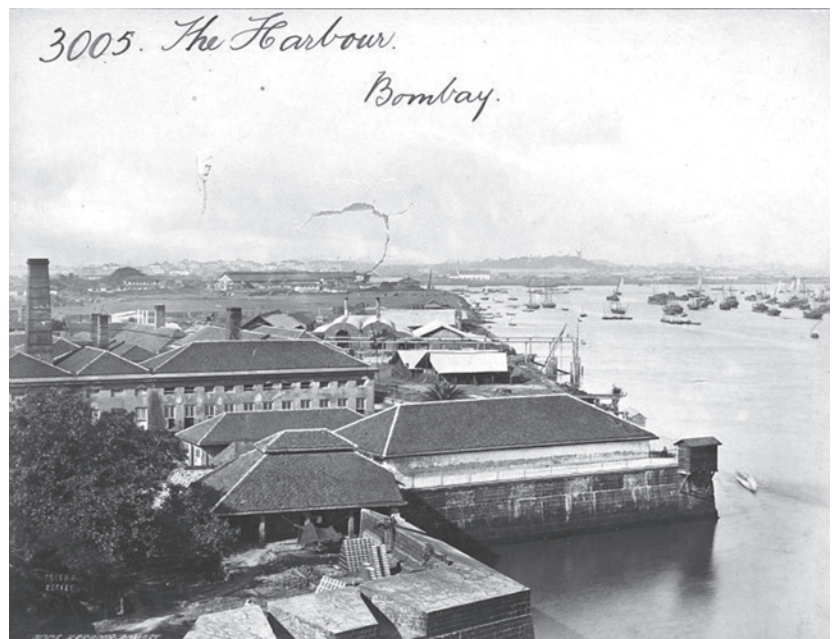
Reeves Calkins boarded the *Rubattino* at Naples on his journey to India. From what he had heard about Swamiji's achievements at the Parliament of Religions and afterwards, he was decidedly critical of what Swami Vivekananda stood for. But during his close proximity to the swami, in the confinement of a ship, the inevitable happened: he was drawn to Swamiji in no time. Calkins observed: 'His answers were ready and usually sufficient; but, more than that, they were brilliant. They sparkled with epigrams and apt quotations. ... His conversation was like Ganga at high flood. There was really no interrupting him. A question might deflect him for a moment, but presently he was moving again on the main current of his speech. At the close of an unusually eloquent period he bowed slightly to each of us, then arose and quietly left the saloon' (108).

Somehow missing the inestimable dimension of Swami Vivekananda, Calkins came out with his own view: 'Vivekananda was a patriot much more than a philosopher, I think his passion for the Vedantic propaganda was because this seemed to him the surest way of fostering Indian nationhood. ... My recognition of his patriotism washed away completely my first unhappy impression of him, and enabled me to know him as I think he would be glad to be remembered by his country-men—not as a religionist propagating an ancient creed, but as a lover of his own land seeking to promote her good in the society of modern nations' (109). We know that the illimitable qualities of

Swamiji's personality had been judged by people around the globe according to their own standpoints. Though such views are partial, they are invaluable insights into Swamiji's personality.

Reeves remembers a night when both of them 'walked over the deck together and talked of the deeper things where there are no Britons, no Americans, no Indians, but only our hungry humankind and of one Son of Man whose sacrificial Blood, somewhere in the shifting sands of Asia, still abides' (110). Swamiji lived a little over fifteen months after this voyage ended, hence his spiritual stature during this time, as witnessed by a foreign missionary, has enormous importance. Calkins writes: 'The mysticism of Vivekananda was a fascination and wonder. For it was not affected. When our conversation touched, as it was bound to, on the hidden things of the spirit, his heavy eyelids would droop slowly and he wandered, even in my presence, into some mystic realm where I was not invited' (ibid.). And with equal ease Calkins recorded the moment when the voyage had a few more hours left before touching the shore at Bombay:

The harbour of Bombay in the 19th century



We were standing on the forward deck. Vivekananda was smoking a short sweet-briar pipe—the one ‘English vice,’ he said, which he was fond of. The wash of the sea and the unknown life which would begin on the morrow invited quietness. For a long time no word was spoken. Then, as though he had made up his mind I would do India no harm, he laid his hand on my shoulder.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘they may talk about their Buddhas, their Krishnas, and their Christs, but we understand, you and I; we are segments of the All-One’ (110–11).

After being aboard the *Rubattino* for eleven days Swami Vivekananda disembarked in Bombay on 6 December 1900. An immediate railway journey stretching three days took him to Calcutta. Late in the evening of 9 December the swami arrived at the Belur monastery. His unexpected arrival on that Sunday night and the infinite joy it brought to his brother monks and disciples was later recorded by Swami Shuddhananda, an eye witness:

The bell had been rung at the Math for supper, ... and the sannyasins and brahmacharins had gathered in the dining hall, when a servant

came running in to announce that a European gentleman, a sahib, had vaulted the low wall (as it was in those early days), had walked hurriedly across the field, and was even then approaching the building! What European would act in this informal, urgent fashion, and what could his business be? Some of the swamis went outside to inquire. And then suddenly, when they saw who the sahib was, an incredulous, joyful cry went up.¹⁰⁴

Pointing to a spot in front of the building where Sri Ramakrishna’s relics had been enshrined, Shuddhananda went on:

He was standing right over there. ... When I saw all the others saluting him, I came closer and discovered who it was. Then I, too, saluted him. He had come by carriage from the Howrah station and on the way had heard the dinner bell. He said he was afraid that if he did not jump the wall there would be no dinner left. We took him into the dining hall [to the vast surprise and joy of the monks still seated there]. A place was prepared for him, and he was served his supper [a heaping plate of his favourite khichuri], and he told us about his trip (403–4).

While narrating this incident, of the great homecoming, Mary Louise Burke writes: ‘Thus Swami Vivekananda, the World Teacher who had given his light fully, unstintingly to man, who had given enough, he said, for fifteen hundred years, came home at last, his journey done’ (404). But he had another journey awaiting him, and he knew how imperative and imminent it was. One day at Belur Math, probably on 29 March 1902,

Bombay Victoria Terminus, c.1900



Swamiji said to Josephine Macleod: 'I delivered my message and I must go.'¹⁰⁵ When instantly questioned as to why should it be so, he firmly replied: 'The shadow of a big tree will not let the smaller trees grow up. I must go to make room' (ibid.). And in making such a decision, like his prophecy before leaving Benares prior to his first visit to the West, he was no less accurate. The proof is abundantly available in the succeeding history of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. But since our topic concerns Swamiji's seafaring vessels, we shall conclude with one of the greatest impacts his journeys around the globe has left on this subcontinent.

The Aftermath

Three noted historians—Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi, and Barun Dey—unhesitatingly write: 'His [Vivekananda's] two sojourns in the west [*sic*] built the bridgehead for the counter-attack of the East.'¹⁰⁶ But Swamiji's journeys to the West had also countless other impacts of immense and far reaching consequences. One of those was the imprint he left on the sea voyage movement of his time, which opposed the notion that a Hindu is defiled by travelling overseas. Even before the swami made up his mind to travel to the distant shore, the *Hindu* of Madras wrote, almost prophetically: 'Bold and fearless examples are wanted more than anything else. Such of us who have means and other facilities must make a point to travel in foreign countries.'¹⁰⁷

The scope of this article hardly permits a look into the glorious shipping history of ancient India, either of distant voyages made by Indians or India's ability to build ships. But the country went into a counter-productive orthodoxy resulting in, inter alia, taboos forbidding sea voyages to distant lands. Without going into its widely discussed crippling consequence, we shall look at what Swamiji did to reverse the taboo.

The editorial of 23 May 1894 in the *Hindu* of Madras, entitled 'Coimbatore and the Sea Voyage Question', reads:

Our Coimbatore Correspondent is naturally jubilant over the very satisfactory conclusion at which his fellow-countrymen arrived in the socio-religious problem that was placed before them for solution. Indeed, there was hardly any one reform which is destined to exercise a more lasting influence on the Hindu community as a whole than unrestricted and free voyage to other countries, and especially Europe and America. Many of the superstitions that oppress the Hindu society are the result of its isolation, and of the prejudice which this isolation has created in the course of centuries. And it can be logically proved that if the prohibition on foreign travel is abolished and a large number of men of the higher castes reside for a time in foreign countries, the impression which Western civilization will make upon them and the changes which as a consequence they will suggest to their countrymen will facilitate the progress of the Hindus. ... Those who are enthusiastic about Hindu religion—and almost all Hindus are—cannot do it a better service than to make it possible for those belonging to it to go to foreign countries and yet remain within the fold of their religion. Nor is it intelligible to us how we can praise Swami Vivekananda in going for Chicago ... and in the same breath condemn sea-voyage as unshastraic [*unshastric*] and sinful.¹⁰⁸

Another instance of the early 1890s: 'It seems also that by 1846 the requirement had gone into disuse in the city [Calcutta], but Surendranath Banerjea was subjected to a boycott in his village in the early seventies. The subject of purificatory rites continued to arouse interest as late as 1894 when the Standing Committee on the Sea Voyage Question was appointed by the Indian Legislative Council.'¹⁰⁹

Let us see what exactly confronted Surendranath Banerjee, who first went to the West on 3 March 1868. In his memoir published in 1925, he wrote: 'A visit to England in those days was a more serious affair than it is now. It not only meant absence from home and those near and dear to one for a number of years, but there was a grim prospect of social ostracism, which for all practical purposes has now passed away. We all three [including his two accompanying friends of Calcutta] had to make our arrangements in secret, as if we were engaged in some nefarious plot of which the world should know nothing.'¹¹⁰ At the end of September 1917 Surendranath had returned from England and found that 'the leaders indeed applauded the courage of the members of my family in taking me back into the old home, but the whole attitude of Hindu society, of the rank and file, was one of unqualified disapproval. My family was practically outcasted. We were among the highest of Brahmins; but those who used to eat and drink with us on ceremonial occasions stopped all intercourse and refused to invite us' (23). This excerpt is relevant to what we are going to narrate.

Raja Benoy Krishna Deb Bahadur (1866–1912) was a champion of the sea voyage movement. He with many of his contemporary luminaries of Bengal were included in the Standing Committee on the Sea-Voyage Question and they held numerous meetings at prominent locations in Calcutta in favour of the movement. A 67 page pamphlet, excluding Preface and Appendix, entitled *The Hindu Sea-Voyage Movement in Bengal* and containing opinions and *vyavasthas*, arrangements, of the pundits with contemporary press reports on sea voyage meetings was published by the said Committee in 1894. In the Preface the Committee clearly spelt out the gist of its aim: 'The purpose of the following papers is to stimulate opinion on the subject of

Sea-voyages performed by Hindoos. Apart from all questions of principle, the subject is one of growing practical importance.'¹¹¹ The Committee further added: 'That voyage by sea as such, does not militate against Hinduism seems to be tacitly admitted by Hindu society by the manner in which it has been treating Swami Vivekananda's visit to America. The Swami, so far from being regarded as an apostle by reason of his visit, is being looked up to as a prince of Hindoos and the pride of Hinduism. It is inconceivable, therefore, that the Sea-voyage movement should be opposed on grounds either of religion or logic' (vi). But before concluding the Preface the Committee was categorical in their moderate approach: 'The movement as at present conceived proceeds on the very safe lines of recommending a voyage by sea where it is performed under Hindu conditions of life' (v). Among the sixteen eminent members of the Standing Committee, Sir Surendranath Banerjee was one.

In fact, Swamiji's overseas voyages had a great impact on the Indian sea voyage movement. On 18 May 1895 Surendranath Banerjee wrote in an editorial of his paper *Bengalee* entitled 'Swami Vivekananda on the Sea-Voyage Movement': 'There is not a Hindoo who is not proud of Vivekananda Swami—who would not honor him and his teachings. He has done honor to himself, to his race and his religion. If we are right in this view, it follows that the opinions of Vivekananda are entitled to the highest consideration.'¹¹² Quoting abundantly from Vivekananda's 'Reply to the Calcutta Address'¹¹³ of 18 November 1894, wherein his explicit views favouring overseas journeys are enumerated, the editorial remarks: 'It is something to know that so high an authority and so good a Hindoo as Swami Vivekananda supports travel to foreign countries. The ground indeed has been prepared through the indefatigable efforts of Maharaj-Kumar Benai

Krishna Bahadur—public opinion is sufficiently advanced, and the time has come when a practical step should be taken to hasten forward the solution of a question which is fraught with such great good to the country' (262).

But what it cost the young swami was included in an editorial of the *Madras Mail* on 15 May 1897:

The question of travel to foreign countries has been discussed in this column before. There is no doubt that it is heresy to advocate it, and the expulsion of Swami Vivekananda from the Dhakineshwar [*sic*] temple was the only procedure open to the orthodox. ... But it was rather strange that so astute a judgement of men as VIVEKANANDA did not remember that by his voyage to America and England had put himself out of caste. Possibly it will serve to make him more outspoken on the question of social reform than he has been. ... Just at present this question of crossing the sea appears to be attracting most attention.¹¹⁴

Two views of the Western press in India merit inclusion here. Referring to the overseas journey by the Raja of Khetri, the *Indian Spectator* wrote on 31 October 1897:

Here was a Raja of unsullied Kshatriya lineage who had dared to cross the Kalapani and who has already been given notice of untold trouble to come to him on that account in the whole of Rajputana. ... The Prince is further, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. ... The Maharaja owned that he owed much to the Swami Vivekananda, not only as a spiritual guide but as one who inspired him with love of the practical western lore too, as well as with the desire for travel, for self-reform and for the regeneration of the community to which he belonged.¹¹⁵

And when Swamiji was no more in physical form, the *Mahratta* unequivocally wrote on 13 July 1902:

It was his ambition to carry his mission to distant lands, and in this respect he excelled the greatest Bengalee reformer—we mean, Raja Ram Mohan Roy. ... 'We cannot do,' he said, 'without the world outside India. It was our foolishness that we thought we could, and we have paid the penalty by about a thousand years of slavery. All such foolish ideas that Indians must not go out of India, are childish. They must be knocked on the head. The more you go out and travel among the nations of the world, the better for you and your country' (394).

A researcher has lately pointed out:

The increase in the number of Indians travelling to Europe by the early twentieth century may be attributed, in part, to the gradual lifting of the Hindu Taboo on sea voyages. In 1894 a group of self-appointed Bengalis formed a standing committee to investigate the thorny topic of sea travel. The committee consisted of three judges and two doctors. The credentials of the committee secretary Maharaj Kumar Benoy Krishna were impeccable. He represented one 'of the most respectable orthodox Hindu families of Calcutta', which no doubt added substance to the committee's hopes of being taken seriously by religious fundamentalists. The Indian press reported the growth of meetings in support of sea voyages. Five well-attended and enthusiastic meetings were reported in Calcutta. ...

The Hindu sea-voyage movement in Bengal launched a two-pronged attack on its opponents. In a pamphlet it sought to show, firstly, the advantages of foreign travel, while countering religious objections, and, secondly, it accused its orthodox critics of inconsistency in regard to their treatment of returnees.¹¹⁶

Indian historians have yet to be more attentive to what exactly Swami Vivekananda did for the Indian sea voyage movement. Maybe the reason, to a great extent, lies in what Tapan

Raychaudhury once wrote: 'The man [Vivekananda] was more than anything else a mystic in quest of the Ultimate Reality within a specific Indian tradition. This dominant concern was the central-point of his life and virtually nothing he sought to do was unrelated to this fundamental purpose. The fact poses a serious problem for the secular historian.'¹¹⁷

Therefore, the choice appears to be whether a broad and well-aimed research on Swami Vivekananda's life could be a justified historical imperative or, as some prefer to call it, a hagiography. In a recent publication entitled *Biography as History* we find the following: 'The hagiographical account, like the secular account, aims in truth-telling. While the secular account rejects stories about miraculous feats as founded in popular exaggeration or superstition, the hagiographer treats this rejection as a sign of cowardice, an inability to stand one's ground against modern scientific prejudices.'¹¹⁸

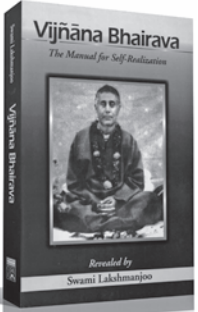
When Swamiji left India he took his dreams with him, dreams based on the harsh reality he closely witnessed as an unknown wanderer throughout the length and breadth of India. He even preferred to overlook the gaping needs of his almost starving widowed mother and young brothers at home to look for means to uplift the millions of his oppressed countrymen. His open-book life attracts people around the world for, among other things, what he has achieved in such an unbelievably short time, is but another proof that there was an extraordinary power working through Swami Vivekananda. ☞

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Vijñāna Bhairava: The Manual for Self-Realization

Swami Lakshmanjoo;
Ed. John Hughes

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers,
P O Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road,
New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2011. xlv + 271 pp.
₹ 600.

Kashmir Shaivism developed the unique yogic technique of *pratyabhijña*, spontaneous recognition, based on bhakti to understand one's identity with God. Shaivism is very popular all over India and the Shaiva Agamas, traditional texts, are innumerable. Like other philosophies of India Shaivism too diversified itself into various branches to form sub-schools within the system. Kashmir Shaivism is one such school and is also called *trika*, triad, because it teaches three entities: Shiva, Shakti, and the individual soul. The triad is not ultimately real but only apparent, as this school teaches monism. In the beginning Shiva, who is universal Consciousness, manifests himself through a special power as the first cause of creation. Then he manifests through his second power as the innumerable individual souls who, because of a veil of impurity, forget that they are the embodiment of Shiva. This veil can be torn off by intense faith and constant meditation on God, by which the soul transmutes itself into a universal soul and eventually attains liberation through *pratyabhijña* into its own nature. Hindus who adhere to this group consider the doctrine of Kashmir Shaivism a manifestation of the highest Reality.

Kashmir Shaivism has a rich and detailed description of the ascent of individual consciousness to universal Consciousness, called Paramashiva. This mystical philosophy has also been described as 'the mystical geography of awareness' because it

offers many practical approaches to the ultimate realization. In *Vijnana Bhairava* Shiva as Bhairava sets one hundred and twelve sadhanas to be used by different sadhakas. The narrative begins with Devi feigning ignorance and asking Bhairava the secrets of Consciousness, creation, and liberation.

Swami Lakshmanjoo (1907–91) was a saint, mystic, and master of this mystic philosophy. For more than fifty years scholars and numerous sadhakas studied *Vijnana Bhairava* with the swami, who also has many other commentaries on Kashmir Shaivism texts to his credit. John Hughes's masterful editing of the text and thoughtful inclusion of an audio CD is to be praised. His reason for adding an audio CD is solid: 'I am convinced that the deeper truths of this scripture will be revealed through hearing the spoken word of a realized master' (xviii). All contemporary texts of any worth today have CDs accompanying them, as repeated empirical research in psychology shows that the additive and salutary effect of synaesthesia—when two or more senses are simultaneously occupied—is more impressive than only reading a text. The CD is a fit accompaniment for a text that is a 'practical training guide, not a theoretical exposition' (xvii).

The *Vijnana Bhairava* is one chapter in the *Rudrayamala Tantra*, which is purely monistic. There is no doubt that this scripture resembles Advaita Vedanta. It is a very lucid text divided in concise topics. The first two, 'Cosmology' and 'Concealing and Revealing His Nature', directly address questions of soteriology: 'Why has Shiva created this external objective world, this manifestation of supreme energy?' The next part of the text deals with the means 'Upāyas': 'The first and highest means is called *śāmbhavopāya*. The second, for aspirants with medium qualifications, is called *śāktopāya*. The third means, called *āṇavopāya*, is regarded as inferior' (xxxi). These stages are the means of travelling from individual

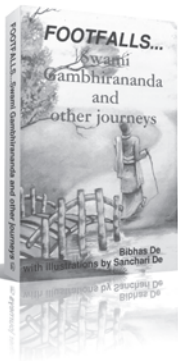
consciousness to universal Consciousness. The Dharana and Upaya guide, at the beginning of the book, makes it easy to navigate the rest of the text. Finally, the book deals with 'Mokṣa' and its nature. Kashmir Shaivism teaches that Shiva has manifested this external world for only one reason: to create the possibility of recognizing his own nature—the objective universe is a means, a tool, to be used to realize the universal reality of Shiva. By contrast, South Indian Shaivism stresses on the duality of the seeker and Shiva.

The main body of the *Vijnana Bhairava* comprises of the original shloka in Sanskrit and its transliteration, followed by the swami's commentary. Each word and term is dwelt upon. The rest of the explanations are in the form of a Socratic exegesis on each shloka. For example: 'John: "What is the point of these lotuses, one up and one down? Is that just a simile, or a way of speaking?" Swamiji: "No, they are existing; these lotuses are existing there. One who perceives that in *samādhi*, he perceives these two lotuses, one in the upper side and the other in the lower side"' (88).

A few last technical observations: while the 'Guide to Pronunciation' at the beginning is a valuable addition, the bibliography is the only weak point in this excellent text; with only seven entries the bibliographic list shows lack of consideration for deeper researchers and puts a dampener on texts as old as 1918. If Kashmir Shaivism is to carve its niche in the world of philosophy, then such frail bibliographies will have to be improved. There could have been a 'primary texts' bibliography and then a sort of 'further readings' bibliography.

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**Footfalls: Swami
Gambhirananda and
other Journeys**

Bibhas De

5916 Highwood Road, Castro Valley,
California 94552. E-mail: bibhasde@aol.com. 2008. 351 pp. US \$ 17.95.

Every once in a while a gifted person comes and astounds the world with his versatility. One such soul was Swami Gambhirananda (1899–1988), the eleventh president of the Ramakrishna Order. The book traces the life and times of the swami's spirituality, scholarship, leadership, administrative capabilities, and venerable personality, which made a lasting mark in every field of work. His presence helped shape the monastic consciousness of innumerable monks and novices, besides inculcating devotion in thousands of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees who flocked to him.

The book also chronicles many people—monastics and householders—who came in touch with Swami Gambhirananda and were inspired to walk towards the light of God.

PB



**Twilight Service to
Sri Ramakrishna**

Swami Vivekananda;
trans. and commentary
Swami Asutoshananda

Ramakrishna Math, 31 Ramakrishna
Math Road, Chennai 600 004. Web-
site: www.chennaimath.org. 2011.
ix + 117 pp. ₹ 30.

On seeing his photograph, once Sri Ramakrishna remarked: 'This represents a high yogic state. This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on.' Formal worship to Sri Ramakrishna was initiated by Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, and today he is being worshipped in millions of homes of India and abroad. Swami Vivekananda's vesper hymns to Sri Ramakrishna have become integral to the worship. Thus, the combined power of these three divine beings, who came for the salvation of humankind, is palpably felt during the vesper worship.

The translations and commentaries of the hymns by Swami Asutoshananda is lucid and designed to help devotees to imbibe more fully the reality that Sri Ramakrishna is.

PB

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda



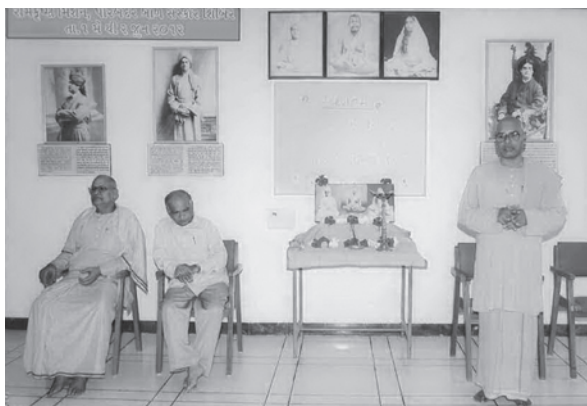
Distribution of books at Salem

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bangalore:** Spiritual retreat on 16 and 17 June 2012, in which about 1,200 devotees participated. **Baranagar Mission:** Inter Ramakrishna Mission School Football Tournament from 21 to 25 June, in which 15 school teams took part. **Chengalpattu:** Processions, bhajans, and film shows on Swamiji at Naduvakkarai, Puliur, Vitalapuram, and Paiyambadi on 3, 16, 17, and 24 June respectively. **Guwahati:** Quiz competitions on 30 May and 2 and 4 June, in which 143 students from three schools took part. **Hyderabad:** On 20 June several books on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam were released by Sri Jawhar Sircar, CEO, Prasara Bharati, and Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, who also presided over the meeting. **Itanagar:** A two-day programme on 16 and 17 June, in which 218 school children and 240 devotees took part.

Salem: On 29 June the centre launched 'Salem District Swami Vivekananda Literary Competitions' for school and college students; the Ashrama will distribute 100,000 books on Swamiji to various schools and colleges in the district free of cost for conducting these competitions. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** On the centre's initiative two institutions, one at Pathuriaghata and the other at Garia, organized public meetings on 2 and 24 June on the relevance of Swamiji's message in today's context. In all, about 900 persons attended the meetings. The centre also conducted a youth conference on 16 June, in which 250 youths and 100 observers took part.

Books released at Hyderabad





New Trustees

Swamis Balabhadrananda, Jnanalokananda, Lokottarananda, and Sarvabhutananda have been appointed trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and members of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission.

New Math and Mission Centre

A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has been started at **Jessore**, Bangladesh. Its contact details are as follows: Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, 2 Ashrama Road, Jessore 7400, Bangladesh; phone: +880 421 60509.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Porbandar, conducted a one-month summer camp for children from 1 May to 2 June, in which 165 students from class 4 to class 7 took part. The programme included chanting, bhajans, meditation, moral lessons, classes on drawing, painting, and other activities.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati, conducted a free medical camp during Ambuvachi Mela near Kamakhya Temple from 22 to 24 June, in which 2,233 patients were treated.

On 25 June the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Baranagar**, felicitated seven former students who had excelled in the higher secondary examination conducted by West Bengal Council



Summer camp at Porbandar

for Higher Secondary Education this year. The students were presented with mementos and books.

Relief

Distress Relief • Madurai centre distributed 5,008 notebooks among 500 needy students on 8 June.

Drought Relief • Pune centre continued its drought relief work in Ahmednagar district. The centre distributed about 30 lakh (3 million) litres of drinking water to nearly 56,000 residents of 25 villages in the district last month. PB

Distribution of notebooks at Madurai



Correction • May 2012, p. 280: read "A few weeks" before leaving London he wrote to Marie Halboister' for "A few weeks" before leaving London he wrote to Mary Halboister—nee Hale.'

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Kamarpukur and Jayrambati

by Swami Tejasananda



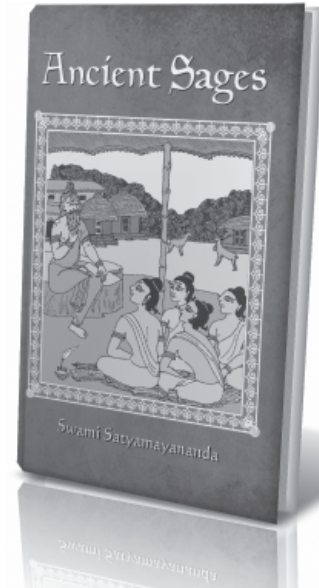
Sri Ramakrishna and his consort, Sri Sarada Devi, were prophets, unparalleled in the history of spirituality, who have left us a legacy of religious harmony and love much needed in the present era. The places where they were born, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, bear witness to the unique phenomenon of their lives—lives of intense spiritual realization and universal love. The soil, stones, trees, air, and streams of these two pilgrimage centres continue to remind us that here once walked divinities on earth. These places invite us to take a dip in the ocean of spirituality and merge with the source of infinite bliss. This book is a combined edition of two booklets, Holy Kamarpukur and Holy Jayrambati, published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Order at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati.

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City Centre: Ramakrishna Math, Trunk Road, Kadapa, 516001, Ph 241633

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A TEMPLE OF PEACE

By the grace of the Holy Trio, the Universal Temple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna at Kadapa is nearing completion, Though initially the cost was estimated at ₹ 140 lakh, now we have to spend an additional ₹ 20 lakh to complete it. It has been decided to perform the consecration of the temple along with installation of the marble image of Sri Ramakrishna on Thursday, 22nd November 2012 (the sacred Jagaddhatri Puja Day). In this connection a four-day programme will be held from 20th to 23rd November. We welcome all the devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna to the celebrations.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President of Ramakrishna Order has kindly agreed to perform the consecration ceremony. We expect about 250 sadhus and brahmacharis and around 5000 devotees (2000 from outside Kadapa) for the function which would include Vastu Homa, Special Pujas, bhajans, and cultural programmes, processions of sadhus and devotees, discourses by monks and eminent persons, and the publication of a souvenir. The estimated cost of these celebrations is ₹ 45 lakh, We appeal to all the devotees and admirers to generously contribute towards this noble event and make it a grand and memorable occasion.

Your contributions through Cheques or DDs drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa, payable at Cuddapah (old spelling still in use in banks!) may be sent to the above address. You can also use the E-transfer facility to remit to our bank account. Details for bank transfer are: Ramakrishna Mission A/c No 30186936408, State Bank of India RIMS Branch, Cuddapah Bank code: SBIN 0010107. Please intimate us the donor's name and address soon after the e-transfer is complete for reconciliation and issue of the receipt by us.

Swami Atmavidananda
Secretary

